The Holy Quran Explained In Clear English

Chapter 2 The Cow

Verses 1 - 100

By the scholar
Mohammad Metwali
Al Sharawi

Translated by Quran Garden

Scholar Biography

Mohammad Metwali Al Sharawi was born in 1911 to a farming family in a small village in Egypt. He was well learned, and throughout his childhood and adult education he excelled in poetry and literature. His talents did not pass unnoticed by his father who wanted to send him to complete his higher education in Al Azhar, one of the most prestigious Islamic institutes at the time. Mohammad, however, had different plans in mind. He wanted to stay and help his family farm the land. Sensing his child's potential, the father kept the pressure on. In an attempt to change his father's mind, Mohammad asked him to buy all the major references in literature, culture, Arabic language, and Islamic studies. These were valuable books, and not cheap by any means. Despite the financial burden, his father came through, and bought him all the books he asked for knowing well that they were not part of Al Azhar's curriculum.

Mohamed excelled in his studies, and read far beyond what was asked of him. He enjoyed the Arabic language, poetry, and was well known for his ability to express his ideas in a clear and simple manner.

He graduated in 1943 and held several teaching jobs until he moved to Saudi Arabia in 1950 to work as a professor of religious studies in the university of Mecca. In 1963 he moved back to Egypt and held a high position at the Al Azhar. And in November of 1976 he was appointed by the Egyptian prime minister to head the ministry of religious affairs. One of his first achievements as a government minister was to establish the first Islamic bank in Egypt.

Throughout his life Al-Sherawi was recognized with several awards including the presidential medal and two honorary Ph.D.s from top universities.

Perhaps his greatest work and most recognizable achievement was a televised Series called "Reflections upon the Quran" . The television show started to air in 1980 with the first few episodes covering his vision

and method in explaining the Quran. This was followed by his reflections upon each verse of the Quran starting from the very first chapter. His TV appearance spanned over 10 years and covered more than two thirds of the Quran. His death however, prevented him from completing the entire text.

Al-Sherawi's method in explaining and reflecting upon the Quran depended on several sources. First, he relied on his thorough knowledge of the Arabic language and its intricacies. Second, He drew on his comprehensive knowledge of the entire text of the Quran, and third he focused on the social applications and everyday life lessons of the holy text. He also took special care to answer those who attacked or attempted to discredit verses of the Quran.

His ability to use clear and simple examples and to illustrate deep philosophical issues in an easy to understand manner helped him reach vast audiences of different social and educational backgrounds. His TV series reruns on many television channels to this day. It is this ability to reach the masses over decades is what we will try to tap into.

Al-Sherawi passed away in the summer of 1998. His funeral was broadcast live and attended by tens of thousands of admirers.

This work is a direct adaptation of his TV series. For our purposes, many English translations of the meaning of the Quran were considered. While no single translation can capture the true essence and beauty of the Quran, we found that more can be gained, and less will be lost, by looking at multiple translations simultaneously.

Chapter 2 The Cow

An introduction

The second chapter in the Quran is named “The Cow”. At first glance, this name seems a bit odd. The Quran was revealed in the Arabian Desert where cows were not amongst the livestock known in that area. However, as we take closer look at this chapter, we realize that the name is derived from a story based on the central Islamic issue of resurrection. This is the basis of religion because whoever does not believe in resurrection, in the hereafter, and in accountability does whatever he or she desires without any restraint. This life becomes his or her objective, and religion loses all meaning. The foundation of worship is that true life is in the hereafter, while our world is place of trials and tests. Either you depart wealth and pleasure by death, or it departs you through loss and troubles. As for the hereafter, life, pleasure, and luxuries are perpetual and eternal. This makes the goal of every believer to gain reward and attain paradise in the hereafter. As you can see, the entire faith is based on our belief in resurrection.

This brings us back to the name of this chapter which is derived from a story that involved a tribe of the Israelites at the time of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him). They had witnessed resurrection firsthand, while still in this world.

The story starts with a rich man who owned a vast estate, but had no heir to inherit this wealth. His nephew, filled with greed, conspired against and killed him. When night fell, he threw the body at the doorstep of another village in order to frame them for his uncle’s murder. The next morning, as people saw the body, they naturally accused the village of his murder. And despite their denial, the relatives of the victim insisted on blaming them. After the matters escalated, and the two villages clashed, they decided to resort to Prophet Moses so that he may ask God to resolve the issue and identify the murderer. This story is continued in

the following verses:

Remember when Moses said to his people, 'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said, 'Are you making fun of us?' He answered, 'God forbid that I should be so ignorant.' They said, 'Ask your Lord to make it clear to us what it is.' He said, 'He says it should be a cow, not old or virgin, but somewhere between the two. So do as you have been told.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, to show us what color it should be.' He answered, 'God says it should be a bright yellow cow, pleasing to the eye.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, to show us what it is: all cows are more or less alike to us. With God's will, we shall be guided.' He replied, 'It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields.' They said, 'Now you have brought the truth,' and so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so. Then, when you killed someone and started to blame one another- although God was to bring what you had concealed to light- We said, 'Strike the body with a part of the cow': thus God brings the dead to life and shows His signs so that you may understand. (Chapter 02: Verses 67-73)

From the verses above, we see that God commanded the children of Israel to slaughter a cow. If they had just listened, followed God's command by slaughtering any cow and striking the dead man with any part of it, life would have returned to him and the murderer would have been identified. But rather than carrying out God's command, they denied at first and said: "Do you take us in ridicule?", then continued asking questions, delaying, and requesting the exact description of the cow, until God specified for them all its qualities.

While the villagers were busy complicating things for themselves, God was helping a pious man on his straight path. This man from amongst the Children of Israel kept God in mind in all his business and social dealings. As death approached him, all he had was a baby cow and his only heir at the time was his little boy. He was unsure about whom he should entrust his small fortune to. Who would be best to take care of the calf until his son is able to take care of it for himself and his mother? He pondered long, then turned to the heavens and supplicated "Lord! I entrust this cow to you, protect it for my son until he grows older". Then he said to his wife "I have entrusted the cow to God. I didn't find anyone more trustworthy than Him". She asked: "So where is it now?" He replied "I left it to roam free in the fields." Shortly after, he died.

When the son grew older, his mother told him the story. He asked: "Where can I find that cow after all these years?" His mother replied:

“your father entrusted the cow to the Lord. Rely on Him, and search for it.” The young man supplicated “Lord of Abraham and Jacob, return to me what my father had entrusted to you” and then set out searching for it. He found the cow, exactly as his mother described it to him. This cow was also the only one that perfectly fit God’s description to the quarreling villagers. Thus, when they found, they set out to purchase it at any price. The young man agreed to sell it in exchange for its weight in gold. When the villagers slaughtered this cow and struck the dead victim with it, he was resurrected to declare the name of his killer. Thus, the name of this chapter “The Cow” affirms the central issue of resurrection in the Islamic creed.

*In addition, the story also teaches us that parents’ righteousness plays a great role in the protection of their children. Through the good deeds of the parents, God facilitates the affairs of the children and protects them from harm. W*hen therighteous man entrusted all he had to God, God blessed, protected and nurtured it so that his son may find great treasure when he grew older.

We find this notion repeated in many verses of the Quran such as the following:

The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do these things of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.’ (18:82)

Being upright and righteous is the best insurance one can give his or her children as it instills God's blessing and protection into every aspect of the child's life.

In addition to the name given to each chapter of the Quran, it is also assigned a designation of either Meccan (in relation to the holy city of Mecca), or Madani (in relation to the holy city of Medina). Let’s look into the meaning of these designations.

Mecca and Medina are two sacred places. The former witnessed the beginning of the Quran’s revelation, and the later was the destination of Prophet Muhammad’s migration. Before we classify a chapter or a verse as Meccan or Madani we must consider some key issues. First: the purpose of revelation; second, the place, and finally the time of revelation. Let’s take them one by one:

The purpose of revelation is universal for all parts of the Quran. The Quran is the means of guiding humanity onto God's path. It encompasses His messages to mankind since the time of Prophet Adam. In the Quran, all the previous messages have been perfected and the heavenly constitution completed until the day of resurrection. Moreover, the Quran relates the story of the creation of the heavens, earth and humans, and narrates the stories of Messengers and Prophets who preceded Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them). More importantly, the Quran corrected what was falsified, altered or distorted of the previous Messages. It addressed what people had tampered with, or concealed, and abolished all that was falsely assigned to God and his messengers.

Next, we consider the time and place of revelation of the Quran's verses. Here, we find that the scholars differed regarding some verses whether they are Madani or Meccan. Those who considered the element of time as the criterion say that every chapter that was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him)after his migration to Medina is considered Madani even if it was revealed while the prophet was visiting Mecca. Those who consider the place as the criterion say that every chapter revealed in Mecca is Meccan, and every chapter revealed in Medina is Madani regardless whether it was revealed before or after the prophet's migration.

Some critics of Islam tried to portray this as a contradiction amongst Muslim scholars. We answer that there is no contradiction since each party tackled the issue from a specific angle. Some considered the place while others considered the time as the standard for classification. The scholars never differed regarding the chapters or the verses of the Quran itself.

As a general observation, Meccan verses in the Quran focus on Islamic creed. This is mainly because when these verses were revealed, Islam was in its beginnings, and the Prophet was facing idol worshippers, those who did not believe in any religion, and a few Christians and Jews whose connection with the heavens had weakened. Due to these circumstances, it became necessary for the Quran to reintroduce the basics of faith, and to make clear to Meccans that they are on the wrong path; it reminded them there is resurrection after death, and an eternal destination either to paradise or to hellfire.

Meccans needed to be reminded that there is no God but Allah and that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His Messenger. The Quran turned their attentions towards signs in the universe that prove that God is the Creator and sustainer. The stones they carved with their hands and

set as Gods did not create anything, and were not capable of protecting even themselves. At the same time, Meccan verses assured the believers that God is supporting and rewarding them at a time when they were few in numbers, weak and abused. As they faced daily harassment, torture and even death, the Quran reaffirmed that every hardship they endure on God's path will be immensely rewarded in the hereafter.

On the other hand, when we examine the Muslim society in Medina, a different picture emerges. There, Islam grew stronger and Muslims formed a well respected civil society. While Islam was still confronted by disbelievers, idol worshippers, and followers of other faiths -namely the Jewish tribes of Medina-, we note a new enemy emerging in the hypocrites. In Mecca the hostility faced by Islam was mainly due to ignorance about its message, however, in Medina Islam faced animosity from the hypocrites that was based on maliciousness. They understood Islam's message and chose to fight it from within by pretending to be Muslims. There was no hypocrisy in Mecca because Muslims were weak and oppressed. Who would want to claim to be a believer and subject him or herself to harassment, punishment, and oppression? But in Medina, as Islam strengthened and became prevalent, hypocrisy appeared. God Almighty says:

Some of the desert Arabs around you are hypocrites and some of the people of Madina are adamant in their hypocrisy. You do not know them but We know them. We will punish them twice over and then they will be returned to a terrible punishment. (9:101)

In addition to addressing the issue of the hypocrites, Madani verses in the Quran set the rules for running a civil society, business dealings, and foreign policy. God says:

You will find the Jews and idolaters most excessive in hatred of those who believe; and the closest in love to the faithful are the people who say: "We are the followers of Christ," because there are priests and monks among them, and they are not arrogant. (5:82)

Madani verses also introduced many rulings regarding personal conduct, acts of worship, inheritance, money, loans, and so on. At the same time, Madani verses did not neglect Islamic creed rather they reaffirmed it. Islam was starting to spread widely and it was essential for the new Muslims to know the rulings regarding their religion.

"The Cow", which is the chapter of the Quran we are upon, is classified as a Madani chapter. It embodies the strength of Islam, the wisdom of the Quran and the knowledge God gave His Messengers (peace be upon

them). It tells the story of creation of the first human -Adam (peace be upon him)-, the story of Prophet Abraham in his quest of faith and the construction of the Ka'bah. This chapter also clarifies some of the obligations of faith such as fasting, pilgrimage, and rulings regarding marriage, divorce and nursing. Likewise it teaches us many details regarding financial dealings, interest, and inheritance.

Verse 1

Alif lam Meem (A.L.M)

The chapter begins with three individual letters from the Arabic alphabet Alif, Laam and Meem. In any language, Letters have names and phonetic sounds. When people communicate they pronounce the sound of the letters and not their name. For example, when you say the word 'drive', you pronounce the sounds of the letters; but if you want to specify the letters by their names, you would spell the word and say "D", "R", "I" "V" "E". Only an educated person can pronounce both the names and sounds of letters. As for the illiterate, he or she can only pronounce the sounds of letters while speaking. If you ask an illiterate person to spell a word, he or she won't be able to.

This is an interesting fact that should draw our attention. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was illiterate, unable to read or spell. However, when the Quran was revealed to him, he started reciting verses with the names of the letters. The pronunciation of these letters indicates that the Prophet had heard the Quran, and was conveying what was revealed to him.

Perhaps more interestingly, we find some chapters of the Quran begin with words that are identical in their Arabic written form; however, these words are recited differently in each chapter. For example, in chapter 94 (The Consolation), the word الم is recited as a single word, while in chapter 2 (The Cow) the exact same word is recited by pronouncing each

letter separately ‘alif laam meem’. What made the Prophet recite the same written word ‘الم’ differently in different chapters of the Quran? This clearly indicates that He was reciting the holy text, not from his knowledge or interpretation, but as conveyed to him by the Angle Gabriel.

Here, we should take note that the true essence of the Quran can only be obtained through listening to it being recited in the Arabic language. A person cannot recite it properly by reading alone. Only through listening can one determine the proper recitation of each word in any particular verse.

When we examine the Quran for verses similar to the first verse in “the Cow”, we find some chapters that begin with verses of a single letter, and others that begin with a verse that consists of four or five letters. At times, letters are in a separate verse, and in other chapters (such as Chapter 13) you find these letters as part of a larger verse. It becomes quickly evident that the letters that occur in the beginning of some chapters do not follow any certain rule or pattern.

Naturally, at this point you may ask: what is the meaning of these letters? We reply that the question in itself is incorrect, because linguistically - around the world- single alphabetical letters carry no meaning. Letters are building blocks for assembling words or denoting a sound.

Let’s, however, not forget what Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told us when he said: "Whoever recites God’s Book will earn a reward for each letter. And that reward will be multiplied by ten. I am not saying that "Alif, Laam, Meem" is a letter, rather I am saying that "Alif" is a letter, "laam" is a letter, and "meem" is a letter."

So while you may not understand the meaning of a verse or two as you recite the Quran, you can rest assured that you will benefit from and be rewarded for its recitation. This is similar to layperson living in a remote village who benefits from electricity, television and mobile service although he or she may have no understanding about how they work. You also see this in the example of passwords used by the military which have no meaning to you, but could mean life or death for the commander who holds their key. So when you do not understand a verse, take it as God has intended. He has instilled within these letters unrevealed secrets and miracles that, at this point of time, we do not understand but can still benefit from.

In fact, the Quran holds many miracles and hidden treasures that encompass every area of human knowledge. Intellectual thinkers from all

fields of study had pondered over God's book and found it miraculous. A scholar of literature who studies the Quran will find literary miracles in its verses. While a medical doctor, or an astronomer will find the Quran miraculous scientifically and so on. Each one of us may possess a key of understanding according to his or her knowledge. But only Allah with His infinite knowledge possesses all the keys to the Quran. We do not wait to find out the wisdom behind the prohibition of consuming pork and drinking alcohol in order to refrain from them. Rather we refrain from them, knowing well that they are prohibited because God, through His knowledge and His love for us, has made them unlawful. Similarly, we say to those who question the wisdom behind beginning some Quran chapters with letters, that God Almighty holds the wisdom behind it, and we accept it from our Lord whether we understand it or not.

You can appreciate this point more when you look at the Meccan society at the time of revelation. When the Quran was revealed among the believers and the non-believers, none of them criticized these verses. Even the non-believers whose mission was to discredit the prophet and his message did not challenge the use of these letters. How could they have missed such an opportunity to attack the Quran unless deep down, through their fine Arabic and linguistic skills, they understood the value of such speech.

So, when you direct yourself to God in worship through reciting his book, don't occupy your mind with pondering the meaning of these letters. You can reap the full reward of worship with the understanding that many of the miracles and treasures of the Quran are beyond the mind's comprehension. On the other hand, when you set out to study the Quran, you can dedicate as much time as you need to research each word, and ponder over its meaning.

Keep in mind, however, that if you claim that you have understood all the meanings of the Quran, then you have confined the meaning of God's speech. This is why these letters come as a mystery to you; So that you are reminded that you cannot limit the meanings of the Quran to your own understanding and interpretation. The spoken word holds within it the attributes of the speaker. In the case of the Quran, God is the speaker; His attributes of perfection are in every word of the Holy book. That is why; the human understanding cannot encompass the ultimate meaning of the Quran. If you think about the meanings of a single verse, you will certainly find something new every day. In fact, scholars have immersed into this subject, and each scholar's interpretation was based on his own level of purity of mind. Yet no scholar has claimed that his or her view is

the intended meaning behind a verse or a chapter. Rather each said ‘God knows best’.

Thus when you recite the first verse from “The Cow”, remember that just as eyesight has limitations, so do the ear, smell and perhaps more importantly, the human mind. But this does not close the doors of research and seeking further knowledge.

Keeping that in mind, let’s look at this verse from another angle. Speech is a means of communication between the speaker and the listener. While the speaker has the initiative, many times the listener’s mind is occupied with something else that could result in missing the first few words of a conversation. Therefore, before delivering an important message, you can alert the listener by making sounds or saying letters to grab his or her attention.

The Prophet peace be upon him said: “Practice what you understand of the Quran, and believe in what you do not understand”.

God Almighty says:

It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you. Some of its verses are definite in meaning- these are the cornerstone of the Scripture- and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’- only those with real perception will take heed- (3:07)

verse 2

This is the Book in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those

who are mindful of God.

In the second verse of this chapter God describes the noble Quran as 'the book'. The word 'Quran' (derived from the Arabic verb 'read') implies that it is read and memorized; the word 'book' implies that it is transcribed and preserved on pages.

The Quran is distinguished from all prior heavenly books because it is an inclusive scripture which contains all God's commandments from the beginning of revelations until the day of resurrection. Since the dawn of time, scriptures were revealed carrying the curriculum of the heavens. However, each of these messages was sent to a specific nation, and limited in its time and place. The scripture of Prophet Noah, for example, was specific for his nation. Likewise the revelations to Prophets Abraham, Lot, and Moses (peace be upon them) were limited to their people for an appointed time. It is for this reason that all the previous books gave good tidings of the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a messenger who will bring the final message to the entire world. His revelation will be universal in its reach and comprehensive in its message. Thus, the previous scriptures have stipulated that whoever truly believes in their message must follow Prophet Muhammad and his book, the Quran. God Almighty says:

Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honor him, and help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful. (7:157)

God had entrusted the previous books to their respective nations. Sadly, they forgot parts of them, and distorted others. More importantly, some unjustly added their own words to the scriptures and attributed them to God. This, in effect, invalidates the divine mission of these books and necessitates a revelation that can never be altered or distorted until the last day. The Quran is this true book which cannot be changed because God has promised to protect it himself as He states in the following verse:

Indeed it is We who have sent down the Reminder, and indeed it is We who will preserve it. (15:9)

So one should have no doubt in the credibility of this book because God is protecting whatever it contains at all time. He says:

This is the Book in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God. (2:2)

The miracle of the Quran can be seen in its style, facts and verses. It narrates the stories of former Prophets, and makes corrections to what had been altered in the Torah and the Gospel. Furthermore, the Quran contains knowledge that was not known to us, and continually reveals treasures in every era. It highlights God's signs and miracles in the universe, and explains God's curriculum. In all these areas, the Quran transcends the capabilities of humans. In fact, God has challenged all mankind and Jinn to bring forth a chapter or even a single verse like the verses of the Quran.

More importantly, however, is the guidance that the Quran brings to us. God says:

All praise belongs to Allah, who has sent down the Book to His servant and did not let any crookedness be in it, upright, to warn of a severe punishment from Him, and to give good news to the faithful who do righteous deeds, that there shall be for them a good reward(18:1-2)

So the revelation of the Quran in-by-itself warrants praise, not only upon the believers, but upon entire humanity because it gives us glad tidings of paradise and shows us the path towards it. It warns against hellfire and that which leads towards it. There is immense mercy from God for mapping for us the right path towards salvation. Here again, we can draw great comfort from the fact that God is preserving this book, so the path he showed us to paradise is protected from any change or alteration. God Almighty says:

Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no one who can change the word of God; and you will not find refuge except in Him. (18:27)

Furthermore, God Almighty affirms through vows, that every word in the Quran is, and always will be, as it was revealed from him to Prophet Muhammad by the angle Gabriel.

I swear by the positions of the stars, a mighty oath, if you only knew, that this is truly a noble Quran,in a protected Record, that only the purified can touch,sent down from the Lord of all being. (56:75-80)

Now that you have in your own hands a revelation from God that can never be altered, that was specifically sent to guide you to an eternal bliss, God Almighty wants to direct your attention to the core message of the Quran……the fundamental pillar of faith which states: “there is no deity except God” as it is mentioned in the following verse:

Alif Lam Mim, Allah: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful, He has verily revealed to you this Book, in truth and confirmation of the Books revealed before, as indeed He had revealed the Torah and the Gospel. (3:1-3)

God is one, He has no partner. The Quran was descended to affirm this truth which the previous scriptures have brought, and differentiate it from the falsehood added by those who were entrusted with these books.

With this great privilege, however, comes a great responsibility. God Almighty defines our mission towards the Quran: We are entrusted to convey its message and teachings to entire mankind. He says:

A Scripture that has been sent down to you, so let there not be any burden in your chest from it, that you may warn with it; and a reminder to the believers.(7:2)

In this verse, God addresses the Prophet (peace be upon him); and wherever the Prophet is addressed, it automatically extends to his entire nation. We should follow his example and convey the message of the Quran to everyone, so that they may enjoy God’s bounties equally. Let’s be mindful, however, that many in previous nations conveyed the message of God to others; and then discarded it or disbelieved in it themselves. Our true responsibility as Muslims is not only to spread the message of the Quran, but to also live it and practice its teachings.

God does not leave us alone with this task, he provides us with the tools to answer those who may criticize the Quran. For example, some contend that this book cannot be a revelation from God because it was delivered by a man. Allah answers:

The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, ‘How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?’ Say, ‘Had there been angels in the earth, walking around and residing, We would have sent down to

them from the heaven an angel as apostle.’ (17:94-95)

And in another verse:

Alif Lam Ra. Those are the Signs of the Wise Book.Is it so surprising to people that We have revealed to a man from among them that he should warn people, and give glad news to those who believe, that they are on a sure footing with their Lord? Yet those who disbelieve say, ‘This man is clearly a sorcerer.’ (s10:a1-2)

Furthermore, God challenged whoever doubts the origin of this book to bring forth a single verse from the likes of the Quran. If critics allege that it was possible for a man like Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to write the Quran, then surly they can do the same. God says:

Should you have any doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant, present one chapter comparable to it and call all your supporters, besides God, if your claim is true. If you do not produce such a chapter and you never will then guard yourselves against the fire whose fuel will be people and stones and is prepared for those who hide the Truth. (2,23-24)

The holy Quran is truly *the* book that brings the ultimate truth to all humanity.

God described the Quran in this verse as Guidance. The word ‘Guidance’ refers to instructions that one can follow to reach a goal. First, however, you will need a clear goal, and then you need a guide to show you the way. The key question here is: what is the best way to set a goal and to choose the best guide?

People set goals and draw plans for themselves every day. Let’s see if this is a good model to follow. If you want to build the house of your dreams, you would start by calling an architect; explain to him your vision and goal, and then he sets to drawthe plans to your house. Initially, the design the architect lays out for you may not be in line with your vision. This is why, in any project, there is a first draft, a second, and many revisions until the desired design is reached. You may even call a more skilled architect to fine tune the project. In fact, as you consider different ideas, your own vision of your dream house may change along the way.

Once the design is perfected and the construction scheduled, you may find that some of the required materials are not available. Once again, you go back and modify your plan. The city may not approve…..so more delays and yet another change is made.

Do you see how your own goal, your own dream house has changed and evolved many times through the process?..........Why?

Because at the beginning you lacked some key knowledge, you lacked some experience, and then circumstances outside your control forced you to make changes.

How about your path to paradise? Do you want to run into similar problems as you map your way to the ultimate goal of life? Of course not! We are all in need of someone who has complete knowledge, who sees the entire picture, who has ultimate wisdom to determine for us the best and shortest path to heaven. He who is competent over all things, the owner of all things, and by whose will the universe functions.

Even in the best run governments, the laws set by humans are often deficient. These laws are in constant need for amendments and changes. This is because whoever initially set the laws, had either an incomplete knowledge of the present, a limited vision of the future, or was self-serving. God on the other hand is all knowing and free from inclinations. He has selected the ultimate goal for you, and has shown you the best way towards it… Following God's guidance is the only way to insure that your goal of being in His Company in paradise will be achieved, and the path you follow will have no detours. God Almighty says:

Say, 'Indeed it is the guidance of Allah which is the true guidance.' (2:120)

If you want sure success, then follow God's path to the goal that He set for you. If you desire what is firm and ever-lasting, then take it from Him who is eternal and absolute. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make your goal and actions in line with God's guidance.

In many instances, we find that guidance in the Quran comes by way of narrating the stories of former Prophets and events past.

Alif Lam Ra Those are the Signs of the Clear Book. We send it down as a Qur'an in Arabic so that you may reflect and understand. We tell you the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this you were one of those who knew nothing about them. (12:1-3)

These stories are not for entertainment and pastime; rather they are a sermon and reminder for the believers. As you well know, history tends to repeat itself, thus, the story of Pharaoh applies to every ruler who transgresses and abuses. Similarly, the story of Qaroon (Nathan for narration قارون) applies to every ungrateful person who abuses their material wealth to belittle people and act in arrogance and impunity. If you experience animosity and conspiracy from your siblings, then you will find solace and wisdom in Prophet Joseph's story. And the events of the people of the cave show us how the Lord showers with mercy those who hold steadfast on his path in the face of overwhelming odds.

Perhaps it is worth noting that most of these stories have either anonymous un-named characters, or characters that are only identified by their first name. Since these events are common, and many of us may experience them at some level, God wants you to identify with the characters and apply these lessons to life. The exception to this rule is in the story of Mary daughter of Imran, and Jesus son of Mary (peace be upon them). Both are identified by their full names, because their story is a miracle that will not be repeated again.

In other instances, the Quran highlight God's signs in the universe as guidance for people towards the creator as the following verse illustrates:

Alif Lam Mim Ra These are the signs of the Scripture. What your Lord has sent down to you is the truth, yet most people do not believe. It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord; (13:1-2)

In fact, the mission of the Quran is to take people out of the darkness of ignorance, disbelief and polytheism into the light of faith. The sun, the moon, and the earth are here for the service of mankind. Yet, no one can claim that he or she has created them. If anyone takes the time to contemplate the meticulous built and precise movement of these signs, it will surely lead him or her to the creator. Sadly, many people get caught up in the day to day problems, lure and enjoyment of worldly life. These distractions often eat up our time and blind us from God's signs. Allah revealed the Quran to shine its light through life's distractions and guide us towards Him, and the hereafter. God Almighty states:

Alif Lam Ra This is a Book We have sent down to you so that you can bring mankind from the darkness to the light, by the permission

of their Lord, to the Path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy. God, to whom everything in the heavens and earth belongs, How terrible will be the torment of those who ignore (14:1-2)

If a person lives his or her life immersed in the moment…..occupied by eating, drinking and short-sighted material goals…..How is he or she different from livestock who live to eat and drink? Life can be alluring in its false hopes, and the constant illusion that happiness is around the corner…..if only you had a little bit more money, a little bit more power, and so on. God Almighty says:

Alif Lam Ra These are the verses of the Scripture, a Quran that makes things clear. The disbelievers may well come to wish they had submitted to God, so leave them to eat and enjoy themselves. Let hopes distract them: soon they will come to know. (s15:a1-3)

Thus, we should use the knowledge, insight and guidance God gave us in the Quran to work towards the hereafter before it is too late. This cannot be attained by wishful thinking, or even by reciting the Quran, work and action are required.

In the previous session we discussed how true guidance only comes from God. However, this is only half the equation. The other half has to do with each one of us. What qualities do you need to have in order to be guided?

To answer this question, we should first examine God's guidance. More specifically, we should highlight the difference between God's general guidance and His divine guidance. Let's take them one by one:

First, God guides His entire creation, regardless of their faith and actions, towards His path. God sentprophets and scriptures for the benefit of everyone. This guidance is known as general guidance. It is available to everyone, and you have the freedom of choice to follow it or not. God Almighty says:

As for the tribe of Thamud: We showed them guidance but they preferred blindness over guidance. (41:17)

If you choose to reject faith and God's general guidance, He will leave you to go astray. On the other hand, if you choose to follow the Quran, the Lord will provide you with abundant support and protection. This is

known as God's divine guidance as the following verse illustrates:

As for those who follow true guidance, He leads them far ahead in their right ways and grants them piety and restraints from evil suited to their condition.(47:17)

Divine guidance is specific for the believers who follow God's path. You can further see the distinction between God's general and divine guidance in the following two verses. God says addressing the Prophet:

You cannot guide everyone you love to the truth; it is God who guides whoever He will: He knows best those who will follow guidance. (28:56)

And in another verse He says:

and you certainly guide them to the right path(42:52)

At first glance, these two verses seem to be in contradiction. One affirms guidance to Prophet Muhammad, and the other denies him guidance. When you take a closer look, however, things become clear. Our beloved prophet Muhammad is the means of delivering God's book and general guidance to humanity. More specifically, the Prophet (peace be upon him) delivers God's message and lights the path to paradise. God, on the other hand, is the one who makes guidance penetrate into the heart of a person and showers the believers with support. God says:

Say, 'Indeed it is the guidance of Allah which is the true guidance.' (2:120)

Perhaps the most important point to remember is: while God sends his general guidance to entire humanity, it is up to you…..it is your choice, to follow it and to seek His divine guidance.

Here you may ask: What actions can I take to be among those who God guides and supports? Allah reaches out to you with the answer in the first five verses of "the Cow". He describes the qualities you and I must possess and practice in order to receive His divine guidance and support. God says:

This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God; who believe in the Unseen, and maintain the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; those who believe in the revelation sent down to you, and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter. They are the people guided by their Lord. They are the ones who

have success. (2:2-5)

Let’s go over these six qualities one by one.

The first quality, “those who are mindful of God”, is translated from the Arabic word “mutaqeen.” This word is very rich in meaning, and the translation “being mindful of God” does not quite do it justice. In fact, If you were to look up this Arabic word in a dictionary you will find it encompassing all the following meanings: (to be mindful of, to shield yourself from, to guard yourself, to be vigilant, and to fear). It is mentioned numerous times in the Quran. Let’s look at two examples:

O you who believe! Guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is human beings and stones (66:6)

And twice in the following verse:

You who believe! Be mindful of God, and let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow; and fear God, for God is well aware of everything you do.(59,18)

Here we have two verses, one is asking us to be mindful and shield ourselves from hellfire, and the other is asking us to shield ourselves from God. How can this be? How can the same word apply to both God and Hellfire?

The answer is simple. To shield yourself from hellfire, you would avoid that which angers God so you would not be punished in hellfire. Mindfulness and good deeds are your best tools to build this shield between you and the fire.

The second verse states ‘to be mindful of, and to fear God’. How is that possible? How do we shield ourselves from God while we are connected to Him?...while we always ask from his blessings? How do you fear and shield yourself from the one you love? God Almighty has both the attributes of majesty and the attributes of beauty. His qualities of majesty are apparent in his names: the Mighty, the Compeller, the Avenger and so on. On the other hand, the attributes of beauty are apparent in his names: the most Forgiving, the Most Compassionate, the most merciful and many more. Hence, we should fear God’s attributes of majesty because they could result in punishment in hellfire. And when we guard ourselves from God’s attributes of majesty through good deeds; we reap the immense benefits of His attributes of beauty.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “when the last night of Ramadan approaches, the Compeller unveils himself with forgiveness”. At first

glance, this does not make sense. Logic requires the Prophet to have said: 'the Most Merciful unveils himself with forgiveness'. Remember; however, that God's punishment for sin comes from his attribute of majesty 'the compeller', and God's forgiveness comes from his attribute "the most merciful". It is as though God's mercy and forgiveness supersede his anger and punishment. The beauty of this paradox is apparentwhen the compeller approaches with all his might and power to forgive. Imagine the happiness and joy in your heart when you repent to God and realize that the one who is capable of severe punishment has forgiven and rewarded you.

Verse 3

Those who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them (2:3)

Those who believe in the unseen. What is the unseen? Why does it hold so much importance that God made it one of the first conditions for his guidance and protection?

Literally, the unseen refers to anything that is absent from our senses. No one argues regarding the objects we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. The unseen, on the other hand, cannot be perceived with the senses.

In addition to the five main senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch), we have many abilities that help us perceive things. For example, suppose there are two bags of the same size and shape in front of you.

Can you tell through your five senses which one is heavier? Most likely you would have to guess. However, if you carry one bag in each arm, it would be easy for you to tell. Through which sense did you perceive the relative weight of the bags? It is through muscle tone, because the muscles in one arm strained slightly more to carry the heavier bag.

In another example, you enter a shop to buy clothes. The seller puts two shirts in from of you, and as soon as you rub the fabric of the shirts between your index finger and thumb, you realize that one is thicker than the other by a fraction of a millimeter. Through which sense did you perceive this? Again, you cannot perceive this by sight or touch. It was through the spatial distance between your fingers.

When you feel hunger which sense is telling you that you are hungry? Which sense wakes you up from your sleep?

In fact, each one of us possesses many perceptive abilities. Therefore it is incorrect to say that something is unseen if it cannot be perceived with our five senses. The unseen referred to in this verse is beyond all our senses and perceptive abilities.

Let's take this a step further. If a student was given an algebra equation to solve, and later he or she came up with the answer, do we say that this student has uncovered the unseen? The answer is no, because the student concluded the solution based on a set rules and principles. Similarly, if the bureau of meteorology announces that tomorrow will be rainy, can we say that the meteorologists have uncovered the unseen? Again, the answer is No, because they based their conclusions on knowledge and research. The unseen referred to in this verse cannot be concluded through the knowledge of principles and research.

And lastly, if a friend informs you that your stolen mobile phone is with so and so at this location…Does it mean that your friend has the knowledge of the unseen? The answer is No, because the unseen is not known by you or your alike. In this case for example, the thief and the person to whom the stolen phone was sold, and maybe a witness to the crime, all know who stole and what had occurred. The unseen referred to in this verse is not known to your equal.

How about God's other creation, do they have the knowledge of the unseen? We find the answer to this question in the Quran. God says about the creation of Adam:

And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell me the names of these if you are

right." , They said, 'Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.', He said, 'Adam, tell them their names.' When he had told them their names, He said, 'Did I not tell you that I know the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you hide?' (c2:v31-33)

And in another example, when Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) died, the jinn, whom God had subjugated to work for Solomon, did not know of his death until termites ate his staff as illustrated in the following verse:

When We decreed that Solomon should die, no one knew of his death except for a crawling creature of the earth who ate-up his staff. When he fell down, the jinn realized that if they had known about the unseen, they would not have remained in such a humiliating torment for so long. (34:14)

Likewise, even prophets and messengers do not know the unseen. In fact, the unseen is that which no one knows except God Almighty, and he alone chooses who to share it with. Allah says:

He is the Knower of the Unseen and does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except only to a Messenger that He has chosen, and He sends guardians before him and behind him (72:26-27)

God shares some of his knowledge with Prophets, and it becomes a miracle for them and for those who follow them.

The highest form of belief in the unseen is the belief in Allah, his angels, scriptures, messengers, and in the Day of Judgment. All of these things are concealed from us. However, we believe in the presence of angels because God is the one who told us about their presence. We believe in the day of resurrection because it came from our Lord.

I have used my intellect to ponder and research, and I have reached the conclusion that this universe, its meticulous built, its life and beauty has to have a God and a Creator. Thus, if a messenger from God informs us that Allah is the one who created the universe, and supports this claim with miracles, then we ought to believe him. When you have this certainty in your heart, then everything that comes from the Lord is the truth, regardless if you can comprehend it with your senses or not.

Some may argue that they have a hard time believing in something intangible to them….something they cannot see, touch, or test. Keep in

mind that the existence of something and realizing that something exists are two different things. For example, germs existed on earth for billions of years. Moreover, people had observed the effects of diseases in their bodies, such as fever, infection and so on without knowing what is causing it. When science advanced and the microscope was developed, we were able to see germs, their life cycle and reproduction. Did bacteria come into existence the minute they were first observed under the microscope? Or where they there the whole time while we were completely unaware? The lack of our ability to see something does not mean it does not exist. God Almighty left some of his creation undiscovered by humans for a particular period of time so that we may progress and come to their discovery. Our faith in Him becomes stronger when we discover many things around us that were previously unseen.

Let's look at another example of something even more intimate. The soul in your body gives you life….have you seen your soul? Have you heard, tasted, or smelled it? Of course not! You came to know about your soul through its impact of giving your body life. If you have a hard time locating and comprehending something within yourself, then how do you expect to comprehend the existence of God with your senses?

The Lord, however, did not leave us without presenting many clues to the thoughtful mind. He placed signs all around us indicating that this universe has a creator. Life could not have come to being in this meticulous order by coincidence. Coincidences are random disorganized short-lived events. If the universe did not have a mighty power behind its creation and maintenance, then the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth would have collided. Without a creator, life and the entire system would collapse.

Establish prayer.

Prayer is the meansof maintaining the connection you and I have with our creator. It is our expression of love, loyalty and humility. God wants this connection to never be severed. He commands us to maintain our daily prayers under all circumstances. If you are unable to perform your prayer standing up, Allah asks you to pray sitting down. If you are unable to do that, then you should pray lying in bed, or even to perform the prayer with eye movement if necessary. You can never be free from the duty of maintaining the five daily prayers until death overtakes you.

The fourth quality in the verse states: "and they spend out of what we have provided them." When we hear the words 'spend' and 'wealth,'

most of us automatically think of money. This, however, is incorrect. The words ‘spend’ and ‘wealth’ refer to anything that benefits you and those around you. For example, your physical health and ability are wealth that can be spent helping others. Your knowledge and experience are also wealth that can lift up the ignorant. Likewise, wisdom and humility are wealth that benefits the society. In fact, anything that can be used for the betterment of life is wealth. So, do not despair if you do not have money to spend, God has given you plenty of wealth to spare in his cause. Use your knowledge to teach others, and your strength to help the weak. The verse: 'they spend from what we have provided them' encompasses all aspects of life.

God continues with the fifth and sixth qualities in the next verse:

Verse 4

Those who believe in the revelation sent down to you, and in what was sent before you, and those who have firm faith in the Hereafter. (2:4)

The phrase ‘what has been revealed to you' refers to the Noble Quran. 'And what was sent before you' refers to previous scriptures such as the Bible and the Torah. This point is important because, with the coming of Islam and the revelation of the Quran, faith in previous messengers and scriptures is no longer enough. Islam came to guide two different parties, the disbelievers who did not believe in God, and the people of the scripture who believed in God, his messengers and his books –namely the Christians and the Jews-. In their view, believing in God, receiving books and scriptures from him and following the messengers is enough for salvation. However, the connection they had with God had weakened over time, and much of the original teachings of the faith had been lost or

altered. This called for a new message to reestablish the connection with God and bring people back to the straight path. Islam is the message that fulfills these needs. In fact, God Almighty had described Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Bible and the Torah, and stipulated that those who witness his advent should follow his message. The scriptures included Prophet Muhammad's name, and description in such detail that left no room for doubt. The Jewish tribes of Medina, for instance, had such certainty in this information that they used to say to the non-believers: 'the time for a messenger from God is very near; we shall believe in him and we shall fight with him, and rule over you'. Unfortunately, when Muhammad attained prophethood, and brought the message they were awaiting, they were first to oppose him. God Almighty says:

And when there comes to them a Book from Allah, confirming what is with them— Although from the past they had prayed for victory against those without Faith— When there comes to them that which they have recognized, they refuse to believe in it. So the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.(2:89)

The prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not come as a surprise to the people of the book, rather they were awaiting his arrival as their scriptures instructed. How could they have foretold the disbelievers about the coming of a Prophet, unless they had certain knowledge of the characteristics of Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Torah and the Gospel?

We now come to the sixth and final quality. Godsays: 'And those who have firm belief in the Hereafter'. In the Quran, Allah emphasizes faith in the day of resurrection to such an extent that those who claim to believe in God, His books, and messengers and deny the hereafter are not considered believers. Islam came to reflect faith in its entirety. Belief in God indicates ultimate faith in the beginning of creation, and belief in the last day indicates ultimate faith in its conclusion. Both belong to God almighty. So whoever does not believe in the hereafter, in accountability to our creator, in paradise as a reward, and hellfire as punishment belongs to the ranks of the disbelievers who regard this world as the only objective.

The believer works hard on the straight path in this world in order to earn God's pleasure in the hereafter. He restricts his actions and desires according to God's will. The disbeliever, on the other hand, tries to fulfill every need and desire and fights for his or her full share of the world. At the end both will die, and if there had been no hereafter –in essence no

accountability- then the disbeliever would have lived a more fulfilling life and would be considered fortunate. Here you can see the immense value of faith in the hereafter in bringing balance and justice to this life and the next. Hence, faith in Allah is the ultimate belief that the beginning belongs to him Almighty, and faith in the hereafter is the ultimate belief that the end also belongs to God.

verse 5

Those are upon guidance from their Lord, and those are the successful (2:5)

In this verse, the pronouns 'those' refer to the believers who earned God's support and guidance. They are mindful of God; they believe in the unseen, maintain prayer, and spend their wealth in God's cause. They believe in all heavenly revelations, and work for the hereafter. As a result, they receive God's support on the straight path, and attain the ultimate success in the hereafter.

Please take note that in the phrase 'Those are *upon* guidance', God chose to use the pronoun 'upon' which indicates elevation and stature. At times, you may feel that following God's guidance gets in the way of your daily life, prevents you from enjoying yourself and from satisfying the urgent needs of the moment. However, this view is superficial, and when you look at the big picture, you quickly realize that God's guidance elevates you, protects you from harm, and more importantly, protects the entire society from corruption.

Let's take an example. God's commands you not to commit theft. If you like something that does not belong to you, such as a nice piece of jewelry, you cannot just take it. At the same time, however, God

commanded millions of other people not to steal from you. Hence, Allah did not restrict your actions; rather He protected your wealth from the society. He instructed you as an individual not to steal, and at the same time He instructed millions of people not to steal from you. Who is the true winner in this case? No doubt you are! So do not fall under the false impression that God is robbing you of your freedom and placing restrictions on your way of life. On the contrary, as the pronoun 'upon' suggests, you are honored and elevated by God's guidance as it protects and moves you from one good deed to another. The prophet (peace be upon him) said "The person who treats people with humility will be elevated by God, and the person who repents begets honor, and charity will never decrease a person's wealth". From this narration, you can clearly see that you attain honor and high status when all your affairs come from the highest most honorable source: God Almighty.

On the other hand, if you choose to follow your own desires, or entrust your affairs to others, you may lose your way. Misguidance comes from within yourself and from within the society. That is why, when you examine the Quran, you will find that God employs the pronoun 'in' when He refers to misguidance as illustrated in the following verse:

Surely, either we or you are upon right guidance, or in manifest error (34:24).

When a person becomes a habitual sinner and loses all connection to his or her creator, the trap of being in misguidance encompasses him or her. God says:

Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain (2:81)

So do not surround yourself by deception and error, and do not engage in constant sin because you will not be able to find guidance and attain success.

At the end of the verse we are discussing, God described the believers who are guided as the successful ones. Let's take a moment here to define success. In a general sense, it means to win. In the Arabic language, just like in English, the word success has many synonyms (such as winning, victory, triumph and so on). God chose to use the Arabic word for success 'Muflehoon' 'مفلحون ' in this verse. The linguistic root of this word "fa la ha ح" means to plow the land for sowing. God Almighty used this word to reference something tangible to us.

In order to reap fruits and crops, you have to dig deep into the soil and plant seeds. We have learned this process from our forefathers. If you go up this chain from son to father to grandfather, you will find that God was the one who taught Adam (peace be upon him) the skills of plowing and sowing so he can carry out his tasks in the world. The reality which has never change since the beginning of time is that beyond sowing and seeding, man plays no part in the growth of the plant. God Almighty says:

Consider the seeds you sow in the ground, Is it you who make it germinate or are We the Germinator?, If We wished We could have made it broken stubble. You would then be left devoid of crops, distraught: 'We are ruined, Rather we have been left with nothing' (56:63-67)

In agriculture you have to put in some effort and time to plow, sow and water. God put within each seed the appropriate amount of nutrients to allow for its survival and for the growth of the root shoots when it is planted in a fertile soil. Similarly, God has placed within each one of us what is needed for success and growth. All you have to do is to put in some time and effort and surround yourself with good deeds and a righteous healthy environment. Allah will take care of the rest. The word 'muflehoon' indicates that obligation in this world, and its reward in the hereafter, resemble the process of the planting a seed and reaping great crops. In fact one seed, when properly planted and cared for, can produce many in return. God Almighty says:

The metaphor of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah is that of a grain which produces seven ears; in every ear there are a hundred grains. Allah gives such multiplies and increases to whomever He wills. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing. (2:261)

Let's take a moment to ponder the beauty of this verse. If the earth -which is a creation of God- grants you many multiples for every single seed you plant……….what kind of multiple do you think Allah –the creator of the earth and heavens- will give you for each good deed you sow? The duties and obligations of faith require some effort from you, but that pales when you consider the truly immense reward you will get in return. This is reason why God Almighty said describing the believers: 'they are the successful'.

verse 6

Those who willfully persist in unbelief: it is alike to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. (2:6)

After talking about the believers, their characteristics, and the great good that awaits them, God presents the other end of the scale. The fact that there is faith that ensures good for the individual and the society means that evil had to exist pushing in the opposite direction. If evil did not exist, would there be any need for faith? Hence, the duty of the believer is to protect himself, his family and the entire community from the evils that come through corruption and disbelief.

Islam encountered two types of disbelievers: The first type are those who disbelieved in God initially, and then listened to His message, and embraced faith. The second, are those who benefit from disbelief and profit from devouring the rights of others. Those individuals stand to lose much of their worldly superiority and advantages if they accept Islam.

The Arabic word for the disbeliever is ‘Kafer’. It comes from the root ‘Ka fa ra’ which means to cover, or to conceal. This is interesting because a person can only conceal something that already exists. God created each one of us with an inner belief in a greater power. Regardless of culture and upbringing, all human beings are naturally inquisitive about our creation and our purpose. We instinctively look towards the heavens for help when we are in a desperate situation. The disbeliever has to exert effort in order to suppress this natural instinct of belief in the existence of a higher power.

The word “kafer” also indicates that disbelief came to existence after

belief. When you think about the beginnings of our creation you will find that Adam, whom God created with his hands, was present when the angels prostrated and when Satan argued with the Lord. So Adam (peace be upon him), having witnessed all these events first-hand, had no room for disbelief. Accordingly, Adam, after descending to earth, would have taught his children God's love and worship. Likewise, his children would have taught the faith to their offspring and so on…But as time passed, some began to feel that faith restricted their actions and stood in the way of their desires. Slowly, obliviousness set in, and people began to rationalize disobedience. Some started to pursue the path of corruption and ultimately disbelief. God wants the disbeliever to go back and think about his or her own creation. He asks:

How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead, and He gave you life. Then He causes you to die. Then He will bring you to life again; and then you will be returned to Him. It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then He turned to the heaven, and fashioned it into seven heavens, and He has knowledge of all things. (2:28-29)

None of us can claim that he has created himself or anyone else. The issue of creation undoubtedly belongs to God and life is the greatest inference to His existence. Thus, it is necessary to remember that the word 'Kafer' came after belief and it implies concealing the existence of God Almighty.

Let's take a moment here to consider one major pitfall that keeps people away from their creator. When you look around you, you will find that most things are subjected for your service. You may begin to believe that you have true autonomy and power to bend your surroundings to your will. This is one of the false illusions that many of us fall into, especially during our youth….the illusion that we are truly independent and have the power to subjugate things. We lose sight of the Creator; the one who gave us strength and ordered everything to respond to our will. God says:

Indeed man becomes rebellious. In that he sees himself as self-sufficient, independent of his Lord (96:6-7)

When we farm the land and reap crops, we begin to believe in our power to subjugate the earth. When we see an airplane take off, we feel proud of our achievement in making it fly. We forget that the elements that make every part of that plane and the elements in the atmosphere that carry it are created by Allah. He is the one who gave us the intellect to design these machines. We often marvel at the dams we build and the

vast fields of green they nourish, forgetting that God is the creator of water and soil. He subjected all of these things for our service. It is the misunderstanding of the true meaning of autonomy and subjugation that often leads people to arrogance, transgression and disbelief. So let's take a few moments to define and clarify this issue.

True autonomy and true power of subjugation refer to something that is inherent within yourself; something that can never change or be taken away. It means that you are self sufficient and everything is done purely through your own power regardless of the circumstances. This is clearly not the case. We do not have autonomy because everything around us, including our own bodies, changes against our will. Think about your life: as a child, you were in constant need for your parents just to survive. At times, especially during youth, you may find that life moves according to your will, but does this period last? Of course not. When you reach old age, you will again be in need of someone to take care of you. Even during youth, you may require help if you get sick or get involved in an accident. If any of us had true autonomy, and true powers of subjugation, then he or she would prevent such accident or illness.

God created all these changes in our lives, so you and I can free ourselves from arrogance. Your possessions can be lost in an instant, and the circumstances in your life can change in a moment. Allah, therefore, is the only constant, He is the only truth. God is free of need from His entire creation. He shapes things to his will, but He does not change. He gives life and takes it away, while He is ever-Existing. He grants power and strips it away, while He is the Ever-powerful. Once you have this certainty in your heart, it will be filled with God's love.

We explained that the disbelievers are of two types. Those who deny God at first, but accept faith when they receive His message. And those who benefit and thrive from disbelief, disregarding the mounting evidence of their error. Their power and affluence are based on injustice and transgression, so they see faith as a great obstacle. In the verse we discussed '**Those who willfully persist in unbelief: it is alike to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe'.** God is referring to the second type of people.

This verse also makes it clear that the true reason for their disbelief is not that God's message did not reach them, nor because they were awaiting a Messenger to guide them. Rather they regard disbelief as a business and a way of life because it frees them from the constraints of truth and

justice. A person who adheres to disbelief for the sake of prestige and wealth in this world will never accept faith regardless of any warning or clear evidence.

God continues in the next verse:

Verse 7

Allah has set a seal on their hearts, and on their ears and over their eyes there is a dark covering, and for them is great torment. (2:7)

What does it mean to place a seal on a person’s heart? Sealing the heart means preventing the departure of disbelief from the heart and preventing faith from entering it. The first question that comes to mind is: If God had sealed the hearts of the disbelievers, then why did the Prophet (peace be upon him) invite them to accept faith?

To answer this question, we should remind ourselves that God Almighty is free from all need. So whoever dispenses with faith and chooses to embrace disbelief, then God dispenses with him and leaves him for what he has chosen for himself. God refers to this in a sacred narration:

"I treat My servant as he hopes that I would treat him. I am with him whenever he remembers Me: if he remembers Me in his heart, I remember him in Mine; if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering far better; if he draws near towards Me a hand's span, I draw near towards him an arm's length; if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a mile; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running."

God facilitates for you whatever path you choose for yourself. The Noble Quran accurately depicts that the disbelievers have made their choice willingly. God placed a seal on their hearts only as a consequence of their choice.

In the Quran, Allah explains to us the faculties and organs we use for perception and decision making. God says:

And God has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful. (16:78)

We use our eyes, ears and mind to perceive our environment and to make decisions. Once an idea is well thought, it becomes a belief and settles in the heart. God Almighty knows that the disbelievers received his message, chose infidelity with their intellect, and accepted this decision into their hearts. God sealed their hearts after they made up their minds. At this point, it does not matter what the eye sees or the ear hears. God describes the condition of the disbelievers in the following verse:

Deaf, mute, blind, so they do not return. (2:18)

Why did all of their faculties of perception become nonfunctional –you may ask-? We answer with an example that we have all experienced. I am sure that at some point you have felt great anger…….Anger and rage that engulfed your whole being, blinded you, and afflicted all your senses. Similarly, the dark cloud that surrounds the disbeliever engulfs all the senses and blinds that person from seeing God's signs and from hearing the teaching of the Prophet.

And just as the disbelievers chose to abandon God and his messages, so does God. He abandons them and makes easy for them the wrong path they selected for themselves as the following verse illustrates:

Whoever willfully ignores the remembrance of the All-Merciful, We assign to him a devil, who becomes his closest comrade. (43:36)

And in another verse:

Shall I tell you upon whom the devils descend? They descend upon every habitual liar and great sinner (26:221-222)

Keep in mind that God's knowledge of the believer and the disbeliever does not interfere with or affect that person's choice. For example, God sent Prophet Noah (peace be upon him) to guide his people towards the straight path. Noah continually delivered the message over 950 years.

God says:

It was revealed to Noah: 'None of your people will believe except those who already have faith; so do not sorrow for what they used to do. Build the ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation, and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned.' (11:36-37)

Allah, through the vastness of His knowledge, knows who will persist on disbelief and who will heed the message. If this truly is the case, then why did God ask His Messenger to continue to convey the message and the scriptures? It is so the disbelievers may bear witnesses against themselves on the day of resurrection. They cannot approach the Lord on that day and argue: if only we were given a chance…..if we just had a messenger or a book. God made sure that his message had reached them repeatedly, and they had plenty of time to contemplate His teachings with their intellect. Sadly, many made the conscience decision to ignore it, and even to fight it. Once the disbelief settled in their heart and became the natural state of being for them, God placed a seal on their hearts. Allah says:

Have they not traveled over the land so that they may have hearts by which they may apply reason, or ears by which they may hear? Indeed it is not the eyes that turn blind, but the hearts turn blind — those that are in the chests! (22:46)

When the heart becomes blind regarding the issue of faith, the eyes are unable to see God's signs and the ears unable to hear His words.

For those who made this terrible choice for themselves, God has prescribed great torment and humiliation in the hereafter. The severity of any punishment is directly proportional to the ability of the one who punishes. When a small child hits you, the pain he or she causes is minimal, because the abilities of a child are minimal. God, on the other hand, is limitless in His ability and power; therefore, His punishment is severe beyond description. In addition to this physical torment, God adds humiliation and disgrace. The disbelievers, who gained status and wealth by transgressing over the rights of people, will be disgraced in the hereafter in front of all to see. God replaces there ill gotten status in this world with eternal humiliation in the hereafter.

verses 8 and 9

And some people say, 'We have believed in Allah and the Last Day' yet they are not to believe. They seek to deceive God and the believers but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it (2:8,9)

People in general belong to one of three different states of faith: a believer, a disbeliever or a hypocrite. God Almighty started this chapter of the Quran 'The Cow' by describing them. First, the believers were presented in three verses. God says:

Those who believe in the unseen and establish the prayer; who spend out of what We have provided them, Who believe in that which has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you and firmly believe in the Everlasting Life, These are guided by their Lord; these surely are the prosperous. (2:3-5)

Then the second group, the disbelievers, was described in two verses. God says:

"Surely, as to those who are destined to infidelity, it is alike whether you warn them or warn them not, they will never believe. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their ears, and over their eyes there is a dark covering, and for them is great torment. (2:6-7)

Lastly, God relates the description and qualities of the third group, the hypocrites, in thirteen consecutive verses. Naturally, you may ask: Why did the Lord dedicate all these verses to describe the hypocrites? He did

so because they are the most damaging group to the faith and to the Muslim society. A hypocrite brings about destruction from within. A disbeliever, on the other hand, has made his or her opposition and actions clear.

A hypocrite is any person who declares and pretends to have faith in God while concealing his or her true disbelief and animosity. You may confide in this person trusting that he or she shares your values and has your best interest at heart. The truth is quite different; your words, actions are often used against you and against the society, as this person betrays your trust and uses it as a weapon for criticizing and damaging Islam.

God Almighty has blessed each one of us with physical abilities, and many intellectual and emotional faculties. In order for you to live in peace and tranquility, your intellect, your emotions and your actions must be in harmony and must not contradict each other.

The believer's faculties are in harmony because his tongue and his actions reflect the belief in his heart. Similarly, the disbeliever actions, emotions and belief correspond to each other. He denies God with his heart, his tongue and his actions. In that sense, the disbeliever is honest and does not cheat himself. The person whose actions, emotions and beliefs are in constant contradiction is the hypocrite. He lives in great disharmony, not only within the society, but also within himself. He says what his heart denies, and displays the opposite emotion of what he truly feels. This contradiction puts the hypocrite in a continuous state of fear of being exposed. God treats the hypocrite in the same way the hypocrite chose to treat him or herself. In the hereafter, God burdens the hypocrite with more fear and contradiction as the following verse illustrates:

Until when they reach it, their ears, and their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them as to all that they did habitually. They will ask their skins, "Why have you borne witness against us?" They will answer: "God Who makes everything speak has made us speak." It is He Who has created you in the first instance, and to Him you are being brought back. (41:20-21)

Here you can clearly see how the disharmony the hypocrites chose for themselves in this world carries with them to the hereafter. All the abilities and faculties they used in deception will overrule them, and the hypocrite’s tongue, hands, legs, and skin will bear witness against him or her.

When you read the verse:

And among the people are those who say, 'We have faith in Allah and the Last Day,' but they have no faith. (2:8)

You can see that the hypocrites go through the motions of belief and worship, while concealing contempt and disbelief in their hearts. Similarly, Allah lets them enjoy the superficial advantages of living within the Muslim society, while denying them the true benefits and rewards. When they go to the mosque to perform prayers, they are not rewarded. When they pay Zakat (almsgiving) it brings them the misery of losing their money, while denying them the rewards of the hereafter.

God continues in the next verse:

They seek to deceive God and the believers but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it (2:9)

This verse highlights the second quality of the hypocrites; the quality of foolishness. They are attempting –through their words and actions- to deceive God and the believers…….but can anyone really deceive God?

Let's start by defining deception: It is the measures and acts designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion, or falsification of evidence so the enemy would act against his or her interests. God Almighty is All-Knowing, All-aware, He knows what we conceal and declare; He knows our secrets and that which is more hidden than a secret. What is more hidden than a secret –you may ask-? A secret is something you confide to someone else. Thus, it is known by two people, you and your friend. There are things, however, that you may keep to yourself and not share with anyone. God Almighty says:

Though you speak out loud, He knows your secrets and what is even more concealed. (20:7)

Therefore, no creation has the capability to deceive or hide anything from his or her creator. So, when the hypocrites speak and act assuming that they are deceiving God, they are, in fact, only fooling themselves. The only reward they get in return is an increase in God's wrath and punishment.

The hypocrites also attempt to deceive the believers. While they may briefly succeed, their constant lying puts them in a state of fear. They are worried about being overheard when they discuss disbelief and ridicule faith. Every time there is a noise or commotion nearby, they assume the

worst. Even a rumor puts them in a state of paranoia. They begin to worry about every action they take because even a slip of the tongue may expose their hypocrisy and disbelief.

Moreover, the Lord comes to support and protect the believers. He helps us recognize the signs of hypocrisy as illustrated in the following verse:

We could even point them out to you if We wished, and then you could identify them by their marks, but you will know them anyway by the tone of their speech. God knows everything people do. (47:30)

And in another verse:

When the hypocrites come to you, they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God.' God knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars(63:1)

This verse relates the incident of the hypocrites coming to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to declare their faith. God Almighty affirms that their statement is correct, yet at the same time He calls them liars. How can this be? The answer is found within the hypocrites' hearts. They only testified with their tongues that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, while their hearts denied it. In order for a person to be truthful, what he or she say with the tongue has to match what is in the heart. Thus, although what hypocrites said was in itself true, they were liars.

If the actions of the hypocrites do not give them out, then there bounds to be a lie or a slip of the tongue that exposes them. And while they may succeed in deceiving their fellow humans, this deception is short lived. God helps his prophet and the believers to unmask the hypocrites and their beliefs. At the end, they are only deceiving themselves and bringing ruin to their future.

Verses 10, 11 and 12

There is a disease in their hearts, to which God has added more: agonizing torment awaits them for their persistent lying (2:10)

Just like the body needs proper food, exercise and care in order to be healthy; the heart also needs proper faith and the truth to be healthy. In this verse, God describes the hearts of the hypocrites as diseased. What causes such disease –you may ask-? It comes from the constant lying, the hypocrisy, and the disharmony the hypocrites live with on a daily basis. It is the lack of faith and the constant immersion in lies and deception that deprives the heart from health and youth. The only treatment for this disease is to abandon lying, embrace God's message, and the teachings of the Quran as illustrated in the following verse:

We send down in the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the faithful, but it only increases the wrongdoers in loss. (17:82)

Take note that the hypocrites have voided their hearts from the two cures they desperately need: faith and the Quran. Therefore, their illness only increases as time passes, and God –because of the choices they make- increases their ailment even more.

Take a moment to imagine a sick and diseased body……It is weak, and unable to perform its functions properly. When you are ill, you lack the strength and the interest to do anything, even the things that are beneficial to you. Similarly, the diseased heart lacks the strength required to acknowledge and speak the truth because it lives in a state of constant fear. God has instilled in our hearts the natural instinct to believe in a higher power, and an inquisitive nature to seek out the creator. This healthy state is lost when a person engages in hypocrisy and deception. The resulting weakness is most apparent when the hypocrites go to battle amongst the ranks of the believers. Their only goal at that moment is to look for chances to hide or flee the battlefield. God Almighty says describing them:

If they could find a refuge, a hideout, or a hole to creep into, they would turn to it in frantic haste. (9:57)

The torment the hypocrites live with on a daily basis does not end here; rather a painful punishment awaits them in the hereafter. In fact, the punishment of the hypocrites will be more severe than that of the disbelievers as illustrated in the following verse:

The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them. (4:145)

Let's continue to the 11th verse of "The Cow".

God says:

Whenever they are told "Do not cause disorder and corruption on earth," they say: "Why! We indeed are the ones who set things right." (2:11)

What does it mean to cause mischief and corruption on earth? It means that you go out of your way to seek what is working and what is upright in order to deform and destroy it. Keep in mind that the bare minimum that is required of you as a Muslim, is to leave what is working and what is upright alone without interfering with it. And if you wish to strengthen your faith and gain reward, you can invest your effort and wealth for the betterment and service of others.

You can avoid causing corruption simply by leaving the elements of life and the environment as God had created them. On the other hand, if you interfere and damage what is working, you would be causing corruption at two levels. First, you would be showing ingratitude for God's bounties. And second, you would be robbing other people from the right to benefit from and enjoy God's gifts. Let's clarify this point with an example….Suppose you come across a well from which people drink. This well is a bounty from God that fulfills people's everyday need. You can approach it with the means and intellect that God gave you and restore it in an environmentally friendly way. You can even improve the condition of the well by lining its walls with stones and installing a pump. On the other hand, if you decide to fill it up with rubble to build a

house, or if you dump industrial waste in it, then you have certainly showed ingratitude to God’s bounty and caused harm to society.

These destructive actions are very similar to the actions of the hypocrites who go out of their way to corrupt God's religion and bounty. They conspire against the faith and claim to be believers in order to damage Islam and cause great harm to the Muslim society.

Hypocrisy originated soon after Islam took hold and built a civil society in Medina. The enemies of Islam noted that, on numerous occasions, Islam had stood up and overcome its more powerful adversaries. The disbelievers tried for many years to confront Islam head on but failed every single time. Islam continued to grow and spread wide despite their efforts. They finally concluded that their best chance is to attack Islam from within by using the hypocrites to divide the Muslim society. From that point on, various ideologies and sects, such as the secular and the leftist movements, emerged. Each movement was dressed with Islamic flare as a cover. When the believers noticed these movements and their destructive and divisive effects, they asked the leaders to refrain from causing mischief and division within Islam. The hypocrites in response claimed that that they are only amending and advancing the faith.

God says in the 12th verse of ‘The Cow’:

No indeed! Surely, they are the corrupters, but they are not aware of it. (2:12)

When the hypocrites operate under the assumption that they are deceiving God, they are -in fact- only fooling themselves. Similarly, when they bring forth any work or project that claims reform, they are -in fact- only causing corruption. This is because when anyone operates outside of God's religion and recommendations, the society will most likely suffer. Keep in mind that life cannot be reformed unless we follow the instructions and guidance of its creator. Allah is the one who brought us to existence, He is best aware of His creations, and thus He is the expert on what will corrupt life and what will make it upright.

Take a moment to imagine the car of your dreams. Imagine the luxury, the speed, and the new car smell. If you owned this car, and then something went wrong with the engine. What would you do? Ideally, you would head towards the person or company who designed and manufactured your dream car. And if the manufacturer is not present in your city, you would look for a trained technician at a reputable dealership. Another place to seek direction and advice would be the owner’s manual. You would go through all this trouble because you value and love this car, and you know that if you try to repair it yourself without the manual or without guidance from the manufacturer, you will most likely make the problem worse.

Surprisingly, we take all these precautions when it comes to our worldly affairs, but in the issues related to our faith, our life and the environment, we try every man-made system rather than directing ourselves towards the Creator. Allah is most knowledgeable of His creation, and when we ignore His teachings, we are most likely to cause harm and corruption rather than make things better. How many projects were made in the name of development, only to find out that they cause damage to the environment and the society alike? How many governing systems were developed only to end up in ruin? When it comes to faith, family and dealing with God’s creation on earth, Allah is the source of the best guidance. Thus, whoever works outside God's religion and alters God’s judgment is causing corruption regardless of how eloquent his or her argument is.

If you truly intend to reform and improve things, you should direct yourself towards the source of all good: God, The most merciful, the most benevolent.

Verse 13

And when they are told: “Believe as the people believe”, they say: “You are

asking us to believe like those fools?” In fact it is they who are fools, but they do not realize it. (2:13)

The hypocrites have a superficial and materialistic view of the world, so in general, when they refer to 'The fools', they are referring to the poor. They looked down at the believers because most of the believers came from the ranks of the poor and those victimized by the unjust social system in Mecca at the time. Similarly, they looked up to the leaders of Quraysh, and were awed by their wealth and power. So, when the Prophet and the companions invited them to faith, they responded by describing them as fools. In their view, the poor chose faith out of stupidity and ignorance, while the elites chose disbelief.

But what does foolishness mean? Literally, it refers to stupidity and recklessness in carrying out actions. Does this quality apply to those who believe in God and adhere to the truth? Or does it apply to those who disbelieve, deal in corruption and throw away their lives?

Moreover, if the hypocrites consider the believers to be stupid, then why do they pretend to be believers……do they want to be amongst the foolish? Undoubtedly, there is a clear contradiction in their actions.

If you examine the behavior of the hypocrites, you will note that their actions embody the very essence of stupidity and foolishness. When they describe the believers as foolish, they in fact are condemning themselves because they spend their days pretending to be among them. More importantly, the show of faith they put up daily does not earn them any reward, rather, it burdens them with punishment in the hereafter. Thus, God's description of them as fools is very accurate.

Let's continues to the next verse of 'The Cow'. Allah says:

Verse 14

And when they meet those who believe, they say, We believe; and when they are alone with their devils, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking. (2:14)

Life can be good and enjoyable only when all its aspects are in harmony. The hypocrites, on the other hand, lead two conflicting lives. Their daily life is like that of a performer in a theater who plays the role of another person's character. Thus, the only place where they can be themselves is when they leave the company of the believers and go home at night. God Says: **when they are alone with their devils, they say: Surely we are with you.**

Here the precision of the Quran can be noted. Satan is invisible, always lurking in the shadows, while the truth is apparent and clear. Similarly, corruption and sin are shameful and always done in the shadows, while honest and charitable actions are proud and have nothing to hide.

Take the example of a man cheating on his wife. How many lies does he have to tell in order to get away from work, give excuses to his wife, and arrange for the illicit meeting? ....What happens if there is a sudden knock on the door? Surely, There will be extreme panic……he will rush to look for a place to hide, or for a back door so the woman can leave. He might even turn all the lights off and stay still until the person at the door leaves. And when the unlawful meeting is over, he opens the door carefully, looks right and left to make sure that no one is around, and then drive away quickly. All this time, and all this energy is expended in order to disassociate himself from the sin he is engaged in. Now compare that to a married couple having relations at their house. If, suddenly, someone knocks the door, the man would dress up and go to open the door comfortably. If the visitor is a friend or a relative he will welcome the guest, insist on having him or her come inside. Similarly, the wife

will prepare food and drink to serve the guest and enjoy the rest of the evening. This is the difference between God's path and Satan's path.

Note how people, regardless of their faith, deal with what is lawful in the light and deal with sin in the shadows. When it comes to Satan's path, actions are hidden to insure they are not seen by others. From here the precise expression of the Quran "when they are alone with their devils" can be understood.

Satan's path demands seclusion, a place where no one can see or hear, so there would be no public disgrace. Hence, the person who indulges in wrongdoings will spare no effort in concealing his or her actions. In fact, if you find yourself working hard to hide your actions and feel ashamed even at the idea of someone finding out, then you should take time to reflect on your action. Most likely you are committing sin and leaving God’s path.

Keep in mind that, as the previous example showed, virtuous values are recognized and cherished even in the sight of the sinners or criminals who violate them. The hypocrites have no problem saying "We believe" in public. However, when it comes to disbelief, they only say it in private. Moreover, they feel the need to explain themselves by adding “indeed we are we were only mocking”.

Verse 15

God is mocking them, and allowing them more slack to wander blindly in their insolence (Chapter 2: verse 15)

God Almighty is the Most Competent, the Most Powerful, so when he ridicules the hypocrites, the ridicule reaches its peak in severity. A

hypocrite chooses to act and speak the opposite of what his or her heart believes, thus God Almighty treats him or her with similar treatment. In this world, Allah treats the hypocrite like a believer and allows him or her to enjoy the benefits and protection of living in a Muslim society. On the Day of Judgment, however, God treats this person like a disbeliever and throws him or her into the lowest depths of the fire. On that day, the hypocrites will again try to put on the act of faith and piety; but God will reveal their inward before all to see. In fact their punishment will be worse than that of the disbeliever because the sin of the hypocrite is more outrageous. God Almighty states:

Woe to every scandal-monger and slanderer (104:1)

The word ‘Slanderer’ in this verse refers to the person who mocks others directly or indirectly. For example, when he sees a person with leg disability, he mocks him by mimicking his walk or by making fun of him. Always remember that a disabled person has no input, power or ability in creating him or herself with such a defect. Hence, if you make fun of another's deformity, you are in fact making fun of God's work. So, before mocking any person, always consider your own defects and shortcomings, and think about all the positive attributes God has blessed the other person with. Allah has granted every person qualities and talents that you may not have. He says:

O you who believe, let not a people ridicule other people, for they may be better than they. Nor shall any women ridicule other women, for they may be better than they. Nor shall you mock one another, or call each other names. Evil indeed is the reversion to wickedness after attaining faith. And anyone who does not repent, then these are the transgressors. (49:11)

God is just; he created each one of us equal to the other. Hence, if you find that you are better than another person in one area, take a moment to look for a defect in yourself in other areas.

When the hypocrites said: 'we were only mocking', God responded by saying **God is mocking them, and allowing them more slack to wander blindly in their insolence** ' meaning that he increases their transgression and allows them to earn a more severe punishment in the hereafter. God lets the hypocrites go deeper into the path they have chosen for themselves; it is after all ‘their’ choice.

Let’s turn our focus now to the words: 'wander blindly'. The Arabic word for blindness is Amma (عمى), however, God employed the word 'amah'

(عمه)in this verse. The two words only differ in the last letter. 'Amaa' means blindness of the eyesight, while 'amah' means blindness of the insight. Just as a person afflicted with blindness in his or her eyes wanders around fumbling and running into objects, the person who has blindness of the insight goes through life with no faith or values fumbling from one moral deficit to another. God Almighty says:

Indeed it is not the eyes that turn blind, but the hearts turn blind — those that are in the chests! (22:46)

And in another verse describing the hereafter:

He will say, 'My Lord! Why have You raised me blind, though I used to see?' God will say: 'So it is. Our signs came to you, but you forgot them, and thus you will be forgotten today.' (20:125-126)

It is the blindness of insight that prevents a person from observing God's signs in the universe and prevents him or her from pursuing the truth and accepting faith.

Now, let's move on to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 16

Those are the ones who have purchased error in exchange for guidance, so their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided (Chapter 2, verse 16).

In this verse, God Almighty illustrates how the hypocrites have exchanged guidance for error. The transaction of exchanging one item for another is what we know as buying and selling.

Let’s examine the details of this transaction. First, what did the hypocrites buy? They bought error and misguidance. Second, what did they exchange it with? Or in other words what price did they pay for it? They purchased it in exchange for guidance, and since they paid guidance as a price for error, this means that they had guidance with them at the time. It also means that they made the decision that guidance is of little value and does not bring them any worldly benefit. They decided to dispense with it in order to purchase error and misguidance.

Here you may ask, what guidance did they posses at the time? The guidance they possessed was the natural instinct and inquisitive nature every human has in believing in a higher power. It is also God’s general guidance that came their way through Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. Hence, it is as though that they had received God’s message and made the choice of rejecting it in exchange for error and corruption. God Almighty guides all mankind, regardless of their faith and actions, towards Him. Allah says:

As for the tribe of Thamud: We showed them guidance but they preferred blindness over guidance. (41:17)

And lastly, what was the end result of this buying and selling? God says: **'their transaction has brought no profit'**. In trade, there are three possible outcomes: profit, loss, or breaking even. In the case of loss or breaking even, we say that the transaction brought no profit.

When a person breaks even, he or she does not make any money, rather he or she merely preserves the original capital. So when the verse said: **'Their transaction brought them no benefit'**, it could mean that they did not gain nor lose anything, but merely exchanged guidance for error. However, Allah continues and says: **'their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided'** which means that they also lost their original capital. As a result, this transaction was a complete loss.

Form all these verse a picture of the hypocrite emerges: It is that of a person who possesses no dignity, no strength to stand for the truth, or to confront his or her enemies. The actions of a hypocrite are always taking place in the shadows fearing exposure. All the efforts he or she puts in result in loss and misery in this world and the hereafter. For these reasons, the hypocrite has low self esteem and views him or herself inferior to others.

A poet once said:

If I do not commit a despicable deed out of fear of people

Then I hold people more noble than I hold myself

It is sufficient shame for a man to see his own blemishes

even if they were hidden from all men and jinn

A man's opinion about himself is the most important one, regardless of what show he put upfront for others.

Verse 17

Their example is that of one who kindled a fire, but when it illuminated what was around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness so they could not see. (2:17)

Here God presents an example to clarify for us the hypocrites' character dichotomy. Examples work by highlighting a familiar situation from everyday life to help explain the meaning and wisdom of something unfamiliar. When you present something tangible and well understood, you can approximate the meaning of something unfamiliar to your audience.

It is said, for example, that a broken heart is like broken glass. We are all familiar that broken glass can be repaired but can never go back to its original pure state. And through this well known fact, we now

understand an unseen matter such as the hurt and broken hearts between two people.

God says:

And indeed We have illustrated all kinds of examples in the Qur'an for mankind - yet most men did not accept, and insisted on disbelief. (17:89)

In the Quran, God presents the example of His light which is unseen to us. He gives examples relative to the hypocrites and the disbelievers so we may become aware of their condition. He illustrates through examples the effects of being ungrateful and transgressing the right of others. All these, and many more, bring forth something tangible from our daily life so you and I can understand the difficult issues that are unseen to us. Why so many examples in the Quran –you may ask-? Allah, the most merciful, wants to help each one of us increase the strength of his or her faith. He wants to shower you with mercy and bring your heart and mind closer to Him. Sadly, many people reject these teaching with condescending and cavalier attitudes.

In order to appreciate how God uses examples to explain difficult issues, let's examine some of what He presented in the Noble Quran. God Almighty says:

Allah gives you an example: There is a man who deals with several disputing supervisors compared to a man who deals with only one consistent supervisor. Are these two equal as regards their condition? All Praise is due to Allah, though most of them know not (39:29)

Through the example in this verse, God illustrates to us the summit of faith which states 'there is no deity worthy of worship except God'. He explains the situation of a person who solely worships God and a polytheist who ascribes many partners with God. Let's look at the example presented: Here is a working man who has to answer to many bosses. Moreover, these bosses are not united; rather they are in constant discord. And here is another working man who has one honest boss. Which one of the two is working in a productive comfortable environment? Obviously the person who has to answer to one boss, one order, and one prohibition. This is a sharp contrast to the other employee who works for many bosses; one boss may ask him to come, while the other orders him to go. If he pleases one, he angers the other. When you read this verse, you can almost live in the moment and feel the stress of

that poor employee.

In the last example, God presented the issue of monotheism from the employee's point of view; the next example is presented from a boss's perspective. Allah says:

God presents another illustration: two men, one of them dumb, unable to do anything, a burden to his carer- whatever task he directs him to, he achieves nothing good- can he be considered equal to one who commands justice and is on the straight path? (16:76)

Here again, Allah wants to bring us closer to the concept of Divinity and highlight the profound difference between the worshiper of a false God, and the follower of God Almighty.

Idol worshippers are burdened by their chosen God. They bear responsibility, and gain no benefit. The worshipper needs to lay the idol in its place and carry it from one room to another. He or she needs to attend to it, and repair it from any damage. Contrast that with the worship of God Almighty who showers you with bounties and mercy, who enjoins justice, and who guides His servants to the straight path that leads to paradise.

The next example, is that of God's light. The divine light that shines and illuminates the believing heart. In order for us to comprehend it, God compares his light to a tangible object. He says:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His Light is like a niche wherein is a lamp; the lamp is in a crystal, and the crystal shining as if a pearl-like radiant star, lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west. The oil would almost give light of itself though no fire touches it: light upon light. God guides to His Light whom He wills. God strikes parables for people. God has full knowledge of all things. (24:35)

Close your eyes and imagine a shallow recess in the wall of a country home. Normally, we place a lantern in this niche making this small space the brightest area of the room. This lantern is placed in a crystal protecting it from the wind. But this is not an ordinary crystal; rather it is pure, perfectly crafted, and shining in star-like brilliance. It reflects the rays of the lantern enhancing the light even more. The fuel for this light is pure oil extracted from a blessed tree neither eastern nor western in origin. The oil is clear and reflective as if it is producing its own light. Hence, the lantern, the crystal, and the oil are light upon pure light. And when this pure, most beautiful light shines in the smallest of spaces, it

fills it with beauty and leaves no darkness behind. Keep in mind that this is not meant to be a description of God's light; rather it is an example to approximate its beauty to our minds. It is as though God's light illuminates every corner and every nook and does not leave any place in darkness. Hence, He is light upon light.

How can you compare God's light to that of a lantern? The answer comes from an entertaining story of the Caliph Al Mutasim. One evening, during a gathering at the palace, a poet called Abu Tammam wanted to praise the caliph. In those days poets were accustomed to comparing the rulers to famous people who had noble character.

Abu Tammam said in praise:

He has the courage of Amr, wrapped in the generosity of Hatim

the patience of Ahnaf, crowned by the intelligence of Iyaas

All of these were men of eminence and great character. After hearing the poem, one of the attendees said in criticism: That is inappropriate.....Our leader is a greater than all those you have compared him to.

The poet Abu Tammam replied immediately:

Don't criticize me for presenting a metaphor using those who are less than him. God has presented for His sacred light the metaphor of a lantern in a recess.

The caliph was pleased by Abu Tammam's wit and cleverness and commanded that his reward be doubled.

We discussed how God uses examples highlighting familiar everyday issues in order to clarify unfamiliar ones. Whatever goes on in a person's hearts is unknown to others, so God gave us an example to clarify what is hidden in the hearts of the hypocrites. From this verse, we get the picture of a heart filled with confusion and indecisiveness in regards to dealing with God's message.

Allah says: '**Their example is that of one who kindled a fire'**. When a person ignites a fire, he clearly has a goal in mind. It could be to get warm, to cook something, or to see in the dark. God Almighty continues: '**but when it illuminated what was around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness so they could not see.'** Here we are presented with a picture of a group who ignited a fire to obtain the

light that will guide them towards faith. But when this light came to them through Prophet Muhammad and the message of Islam, they walked away from it. At that point, God extinguished their light and left their hearts engulfed in darkness. Keep in mind that these were the same people who requested guidance and faith to begin with. When God granted their request, they walked away and abandoned it.

Let's put this in a historic context. A few years prior to the arrival of Islam and Prophet Muhammad, the residents of Medina heard the surrounding Jewish tribes say that the time for a new Prophet has come. Furthermore, the Jewish tribes threatened that when the time comes, they will follow the prophet and use their new found power to control the city and bear arms against its infidel residents. Some residents of Medina, especially the elites who feared for their status, weighed their options and decided to believe in the prophet. They did not seek faith out of sincerity; rather they saw it as a tool to obtain security and protection. When Prophet Muhammad arrived in medina and invited them to join the faith, they declared belief, not with their hearts, but only with their tongues, and thus became the hypocrites. They had no interest in embracing or advancing Islam; they only wanted to use it for their personal gain.

Here, we should take note of the precision of the Quran. Allah said: **'God took away the light.'** In the Arabic language there are two words that mean light. 'ضوء' refers to light that is coming from the source producing the light. And 'noor' which indicates a lit object that is not the source of light. To clarify the difference between 'ضوء' and noor, let's look at the following verse:

He is Who made the sun radiate brilliant light and the moon noor reflecting a lustre, and fixed for it stages according to an estimated measure that you might know the counting of the years and the reckoning of time. Allah created all this only to suit the requirements of truth and wisdom. He explains in detail these signs for a people who would know. (10:5)

The sun is self-illuminating and was referred to in the verse as 'ضوء', while the moon obtains light from the sun and then reflects it, thus, the word 'noor' was used.

In the verse we are studying, God said that he took away the noor of the hypocrites. If God had said that he took away their light, it could mean that they may have noor or guidance reflecting from another source. But the word 'noor' in the verse implies that God left them with nothing, no

light source.....not even a reflection. Their hearts are now engulfed in total darkness.

God says: ‘**and He left them in darknesses where they could see nothing’**

The word that immediately stands out in this part of the verse is darknesses because it is used in the plural form, not the singular that we are all used to. God used this word to indicate the accumulation of darkness, one piled upon the other that result from the love of this world and the complete disregard of the hereafter. Perhaps this is best explained through a historical example. Abdullah ibn Obay was the leader of the hypocrites at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Right before the prophet migrated to medina, the residents of the city were preparing to crown ibn Obay as their leader and king. However, when the message of Islam reached Medina, followed shortly by the Prophet's migration, people walked away from crowning ibn Oday. The arrival of Islam had literally cost him his kingship. Here Ibn Oday had the choice of joining his people, accepting faith, and securing both a leadership role and an eternal kingdom in the hereafter. But his heart was filled with hate, resentment, and the love of this world, so he chose to fight Islam from within. Bitterness, jealousy, and hatred had overcome his heart.....Each of these dark feelings wraps the heart in its own veil of darkness; one piled over the other.

Likewise, in the heart of every hypocrite there are many layers of darkness. The darkness of malice towards the believers, the darkness of hatred towards faith, the darkness of ill-wish, and the darkness and pain of contradiction.

As for the believers, God the most merciful also wraps their hearts......this time He wraps them in a veil of protection. He says:

When you recite the Qur’an, We place an invisible veil between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter (17:45)

Let's turn our attention now to the following phrase. God says: **‘He left them in darknesses seeing nothing.”** This phrase shows the scientific accuracy of the Quran. When God took light away, He said that it resulted in the loss of sight. We all know that if light disappears so does our ability to see. However, this piece of common knowledge is fairly recent. Up until the 11th century, one of the prevailing scientific theories about vision postulated that we see objectswhen our eyes shine a ray on them. In other words many scientists used to believe that the eyes

produce the rays that made vision possible. This flawed theory was put to rest by a famous Muslim scientist (Ibn Al Haytham) in his book 'The Optics'. The Quran was scientifically accurate hundreds of years prior.

Allah says:

We made the night and the day two signs; and We make dark the sign of the night and make the sign of the day sight-giving, that you may seek the bounty of your Lord, and that you may calculate the years and the reckoning; and We have expounded everything in detail. (17:12)

Let's on to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

verse 18

Deaf, mute, blind , so they do not return (2:18)

God took away the light of hope and faith from the hearts of the hypocrites because of their continuous rejection of God's guidance. Sadly, it was not only insight that they lost, but the loss also extended to all their senses. God Almighty says:

It is God who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful. (16:78)

When it comes to matters of faith, the hypocrites have lost the ability to hear and comprehend the truth, the ability to speak the truth, and even the ability to see God's signs and miracle of creation all around them. They live as if they are deaf, mute and blind to the truth. This loss is not temporary, rather, because of their continued transgression, they will never return to the right way. When the heart is corrupt, it cannot

appreciate the difference between the fleeting joy of this world and the immense perpetual reward of the hereafter. That's why while we should always do our duty of spreading God's message to all mankind; we should not insists or force guidance on anyone. Some people simply choose another path.

Verse 19

Or like rain pouring from the sky which hides within it darkness, thunder and lightning. They thrust their fingers into their ears for safety against noise and death. But God surrounds those who do not believe from all sides. (Chapter 2:Verse 19)

Rain is one of God's greatest bounties to humanity. Water, after all, is the source of life. In fact, NASA has recently adopted a new strategy called "follow the water" in the quest to find life on other planets. Allah says:

Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart, that We made every living thing from water? Will they not believe? (21:30)

We undoubtedly know that rain is the domain of God alone. The process of forming clouds and producing rain involves precise calculations that were taken into account since the time of creation. Take for example the scientific wisdom behind covering ¾ of the surface of the earth with water. Have you wondered why is it so? God has spread the oceans so the process of evaporation can be easy and sufficient. The wider the

water surface, the more readily it evaporates allowing clouds to form. If you leave a glass of water in a room and then come back to check the next day, you will find that the volume of water has decreased by a small fraction. However, if you pour the same glass of water on the floor you will find that the water will disappear in a few hours. This is because when water is spread over a large area, the process of evaporation is accelerated. Similarly, Allah widened the surface area covered by water to allow for adequate evaporation under direct sunlight. He created this with great precision so rain does not drown the earth, nor droughts starve it. He subjected the wind to carry the clouds to wherever He wills, and the peaks of cold mountains to collide with the clouds so that rain and streams reach all the valleys below. In fact, since the dawn of time, man realized the great benefit of rain and celebrated at the first sight of heavy dark clouds.

However, when we look at the example of the hypocrites in this verse, we find a group that does not pay attention to the great good coming their way. A group that neglects the immense long term benefits of rain, and focuses the short term negatives. They only paid attention to the darkness of the clouds, feared the thunder-claps and lightning flashes, ignoring that all these signal the coming of rain and life. Similarly, when Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came with the message of Islam, they could not see the great benefits of God's gift; rather they become fixated on the possibility of losing their short lived status and ill gotten wealth.

God continues: '**They thrust their fingers into their ears for safety against noise and death'** When most of us want to protect our ears from a loud noise, we gently put the tips of our fingers in the ear. Compare that to the description of the hypocrites thrusting the entire finger into their ears indicating a state of unrealistic fear and paranoia.

When you are terrified, you cannot think straight or see the reality of things. You can only see the world through the prism of fear. This group cannot see the actual blessing of rain that guarantees life and brings crops and fruits. They are only fixated on the thunder-claps and lightening. Similarly, the hypocrites are fixated on the short term work and hardship of embracing faith, and have completely lost sight of the great benefits it will bring them in this world and the next. Just as the loud noise of thunder, and blinding flash of lightning are short lived and followed by the benefits of rain; the hard work of adhering to God's path is short lived and followed by eternal bliss in the hereafter. Hypocrites intend to take benefits from Islam without performing the duties imposed by the religion.

When you lose faith, you are only left with a purely materialistic view of this world. You become obsessed with what is temporary and apparent, and negligent about what is beneficial and everlasting. We live in a world that is obsessed with instant gratification, and pursuing the desires of the moment. However, there is great good that can be reaped if you adhere to the truth and the mandates of faith. Rain brings life, and so does faith.

God says at the end of the verse: '**But God surrounds those who do not believe from all sides.'** Here, God wants to draw your attention to the fact those who choose to abandon God's path, and live for the gratification of the moment do not escape God's control and judgment. The word surround means to have complete power and control over something to the extent that there remains no room for escape. God encompasses the believers and the disbelievers alike. So if you choose to act in way that is not according to God's teachings, keep in mind, that you cannot choose to escape God's judgment and the consequences of your actions.

Verse 20

The lightning almost snatches away their sight. Whenever it gives them light, they take a few steps in it, and when the darkness covers them, they stand still. Had God so willed, indeed He would have taken away their hearing and sight. Surely God has full power over everything.(2:20)

In this verse, God continues with the example of the hypocrites' state of loss and confusion. Lightning is fleeting, only lasting a fraction of a second. Moreover, its flash is blinding and produces very little useful light. It is very similar to the light of this world which is also fleeting and a poor source of guidance. Compare that to the guiding light of Islam that ever shines, and leads to God's company in paradise. If the hypocrites had accepted God's guidance when it reached them, Islam would have illuminated their hearts and led them to paradise. But they preferred to follow their desires in this world and were left in darkness and confusion.

The verb 'snatches' means to grab something against the owner's will and without seeking permission first. If a child goes to a candy shop and snatches a piece of chocolate, the owner of the shop has no power to stop the child from stealing and running off, because it all happens suddenly. Similarly, if you live in this world without God's guidance, then life will snatch your attention, taking you in one direction and then in another against your will.

God continues: **Whenever it gives them light, they take a few steps in it, and when the darkness covers them, they stand still.**' If you have no guiding light in your heart, you will have to rely on others and on the world around you for guidance. You become very vulnerable to getting lost when these lights abandon you.

God says: **'If Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight'.**

Some critics of Islam claim that this verse contradicts with a previous one that described the hypocrites as **'deaf, mute, blind; so they will never return'**. How can the hypocrites be deaf, mute and blind in one verse, while in another, God is threatening to take away their sight and hearing? The answer is quite simple.

In the first verse Allah is talking about blindness of faith and loss of insight. The hypocrites do not see God's signs, nor do they hear or understand the verses of the Quran. All their perceptive abilities fail when it comes to spiritual matters. God Almighty says:

Among them are those who listen to you and then, when they leave your presence, say to those who have been given knowledge, 'What was that he just said?' They are those whose hearts Allah has sealed

up and who follow their own desires. (47:16)

When it comes to matters of faith, they hear but do not reason, and see but do not heed. However, when it comes to the physical objects and worldly matters, their eyesight, hearing and minds work just fine. These are the senses that God is threatening to take away in the 2nd verse. Generally, these senses are our means of perception, and when we use them in the manner God intended, they help increase our faith and love for Allah. The hypocrites, on the other hand, only use their senses for worldly enjoyment and for following Satan's path. Hence, the senses of sight, hearing, and reason are used in a manner exactly opposite to their intended task. It is as though these organs do not function or even exist.

For this reason, if God had willed He would also have left the hypocrites physically blind and deaf. God, however, is the most merciful. He wants to give each one of us all the tools we need to find and follow his path. The disbelievers and hypocrites cannot come on the day of Judgement arguing that if only they were given sight they would have been able to follow the right path......And if they could only hear, they would have accepted God's messages. In fact, on the day of judgment, they will bear witness that they had all the tools needed, but chose to walk away from God's guidance. They chose the immediate short lived gratification in the world over justice and eternal paradise in the hereafter.

If you fail to pay attention to the true values of life, and spend your time chasing immediate short-lived gratification, the allure of the world will snatch you and toss you in one direction and then the next. Moreover, when you face loss or obstacles, you become vulnerable to despair as darkness encompasses you from every corner. Allah offers you an alternative that gives you peace and tranquillity in this life, and ultimate success in the next.

Now, let's move to the 21st verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 21

O mankind! Worship your Lord, who

created you and those who were before you, so that you may be Godwary.(2:21)

In the previous thirteen verses God highlighted the characteristics of the hypocrites. He presented through examples what's in their hearts so we may be aware of their threat. The Quran explains that the hypocrites did not only deny God as their deity and creator, but they also refused to believe in Him as their Lord who provides them with all the necessities and luxuries of life. The grants of our Lord are guaranteed for all creations whether they are believers or disbelievers. He is the one who brought us into existence, and He guarantees for us the provisions of livelihood.

God does not deprive anyone from the grants of Lordship in this world. The sun rises on the believer and disbeliever alike; rain pours down on the one who testifies that there is no deity but Allah, and the atheist alike. Similarly, the one who establishes prayer and the one who has never bowed or knelt before God breath the same air, enjoy the same water and eat from the same crops. These, and countless more, are the grants of God's Lordship.

In this verse Allah directs our attention towards the fact that the grants of Lordship should be enough proof for anyone to believe in Him and follow His path. The verse begins with the phrase "O Mankind" which means that it is addressed directly to each and every one of us in every era and in every place from the time of revelation until the day of Resurrection.

God begins the verse with the most general and valuable gift, the gift of life. He says: **'He who created you and those before you'.** The gift of life is, in by itself, enough to obligate the duty of worship upon each one of us. The appreciation and respect for life also extends to include our duty towards our parents who are the means of bringing us into this world. Allah says:

Your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say no word that shows impatience with them, and do not be harsh with them, but speak to them respectfully(17:23)

While God is the creator of life, we find that He has elevated parenthood

to a high status and honoured the hard work and patience every father and mother put into raising their children. And while Allah is the creator and the sustainer, He respects and values our work and effort in all aspects of life. We find an example of this concept when it comes to wealth. God says:

Who will give God a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over? It is God who withholds and God who gives abundantly, and it is to Him that you will return. (2:245)

All wealth belongs to God and He gives it to whomever He wills; however, God honours your work and effort in earning and growing this wealth. When he asks you to give alms and charity, God does not ask you to give the wealth back to Him, rather he asks you for a loan, and promises a great reward and many multiples in return.

God wants you to appreciate and value the gift of life. He says at the end of the verse: '**so that you may be Godwary.**' The word Godwary is translated from the Arabic word 'Taqwa' تقوى. which is rich in meaning. It means: to be mindful of, to fear, to shield yourself from. How can we be wary and fear God, our creator, our sustainer, the one we love? The answer lies in God's attributes. God Almighty has the attributes of grandeur and the attributes of beauty. The attributes of grandeur consist of qualities such as the Compeller, the Subduer, the Supreme, the Strong, the Competent, the Dominant, and so on. God wants us to be mindful of His qualities of grandeur and hold fast to His qualities of beauty......Qualities such as the Merciful, the Affectionate, the Forgiving and many more. Our salvation from fire lies in doing good deeds and respecting the rights of our Lord and the rights of others.

If you have faith in God and if you want to know what He asks of you, what your obligations are, your rights, and the best way to receive God's mercy and protection, then look through the Quran for the verses that give you all this information. These verses are easy to find. They start with the phrase: **"O you who believe"**. In these verses Allah addresses you directly, and shows you the best and shortest way to be in his company in paradise. This is truly the best way to value and respect the gift of life.

Verse 22

He who made for you the earth a bed and the sky a ceiling, and sent down from the sky rain, and by it brings forth fruits for your provision. Do not, then, knowingly make others equal to Allah.(2:22)

God wants us to know that the grants of His Lordship are gifts to all his creation. And these grants should be sufficient evidence for anyone to be grateful and accept faith. In this verse God explains in detail these grants so perhaps the light of appreciation and gratitude penetrates into the hearts of those who have not yet believed.

let's start with the first part that says: '**He who made for you the earth a bed'**

Earth is the place where we all live, yet no one can claim that he or she created this planet or made it suitable for life. Earth is a sign of God's Lordship. This fact is axiomatic and does not take much mental effort to recognize. The word 'bed' suggests that Allah made the earth as a place of comfort. He prepared it in a way that suits humans throughout time. While we may now consider sleeping on the ground unpleasant, our ancestors did it for thousands of years quite comfortably. As civilizations progressed and luxurious lifestyles evolved, softer beddings were made.....And every generation achieved a new level of luxury through the knowledge that God granted, and from the material the earth yields.

God says in another verse:

He Who has made the earth a cradle for you, and has set on it routes for you so that you may find your way (43:10)

Parents usually take utmost care to make the baby's cradle safe and

comfortable. Similarly, God prepared earth to provide comfort and protection for mankind. He subjected it to our service and put within it all we need for sustenance and development until the last day. Allah says:

He Who has made the earth subservient to you, so go about through its shoulders and eat of His provision; and to Him will be the Resurrection. (67:15)

Then God described the sky as a ceiling. The word ceiling suggests solidity and protection. The atmosphere that we see above us forms a canopy that provides a shield to earth from all the dangers of space. God Almighty says:

Have you not considered how God has made everything on the earth of service to you? That ships sail the sea at His command? That He keeps the heavens from falling down on the earth without His permission? God is most compassionate and most merciful to mankind (22:65)

And in another verse:

and We made the sky a well-secured canopy- yet from its wonders they turn away. (21:32)

All of these verses emphasize that we should feel assured that the heavens will not fall upon us while we live comfortably on earth. More importantly, we should feel assured because Allah is our lord cradling and protecting us at all time.

God continues:

"and sent down from the sky rain, and by it brings forth fruits for your provision."

After providing us with a comfortable and safe place to live, God Almighty gave us all the means of sustenance and development. Rain descends from the sky to grow crops and fruits for our livelihood. When many of us think about what supports us, gives us livelihood and sustenance, the first thing that often comes to mind is money. This, however, is not true. Sustenance encompasses all that benefits you, whether it is health, food, money or knowledge. You can earn a great deal of money, then spend it on drugs, alcohol or waste it on something to your determent, not livelihood. Even the money you save may end up benefiting someone else after your passing.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches us the truth about wealth. He said: *"A person says, My wealth. my wealth. But out of his wealth there are a few things that are truly his: whatever he eats is his, and whatever he wears until it wears out is his, and finally, whatever he gives as charity is his. Charity is truly the wealth man stores for himself for the Hereafter".* Wealth is a broad term that includes health, children, food, knowledge and much more. So if you want to store your wealth in the safest of places for your time of need, make sure you use it to help others in charity.

Here we should take a few moments to ponder how Allah created this universe. More specifically, the order of creation. Before God brought man into existence, He created the elements that guarantees his survival. In addition to preparing earth with all our material and biological needs, God also created that which is vital for our spiritual wellbeing. He says:

It is the Lord of Mercy, who taught the Quran. He created man, and taught him articulate speech (55:1-4)

The heavenly messages, the Holy books, the Quran, and the guidance that insure our success in this world were all created before 'Adam'. Keep in mind that the purpose of this life is to prepare for and obtain ultimate success in the next. God's messages and the Quran give our lives value and map the way to paradise. Without these gifts, the world would have no meaning because it will lead us to nowhere.

In fact all the good that comes our way comes from the heavens, whether it is the guidance of the Quran, or the rain that gives us fruits and crops. Allah gave the example of water and rain because it is a direct gift we can experience firsthand. Just as the Quran came from the heavens to give us life, so does pure water. It pours from the sky and brings life with it. From it we drink, eat and build. Think about what it would take to produce a small amount of fresh water. The process of artificially purifying and desalinating the ocean water to make it suitable for human consumption is extremely expensive, polluting, and uses large amounts of energy. It produces an amount of water barely enough for a small town. God Almighty, on the other hand, pours water from the sky in its purest form and in sufficient quantities to guarantee the continuation of life in this universe. This process happens naturally, without pollution, and is free for all humanity.

When you come to know and appreciate all these blessings, and when you begin to comprehend the miracles hidden within them, God Almighty tells you: **“Do not, then, knowingly make others equal to**

Allah.". A mind bearing the slightest amount of intellect will refrain from ascribing a partner or an equal to God. Allah is one in His power, His ability, His knowledge and most importantly, in His mercy and immense gifts.

We highlighted God's immense gifts to humanity.....the gift of life, the gift of safety and security on earth, rain, and countless more. All these gifts lead the thoughtful mind to one conclusion: Love towards our creator: God the most merciful.

The attributes of God cannot be compared to those of the creation. For example, God is generous, and so are some people, however, God's generosity is abundant, everlasting, and infinite unlike any other. Each one of us instinctively knows that he or she cannot comprehend the perfection and immensity of God's attributes. Therefore, it is logical that our mind will refuse to assign equals or partners to God.

The phrase **'while you know'** at the end of the verse means that the knowledge of the oneness and perfection of Allah is natural and inert within each one of us. Who can claim that he has created you and those before you?! Who can claim that he has made the earth suitable for life, and the sky a protecting canopy over it? Who can claim to pour rain and grows fruits and crops? No one can.....And since no one can claim any of these creations to him or herself, the matter is settled by default to the one who claimed it and provided proof: Allah.

He says:

Even so, there are some who choose to worship others besides God as rivals to Him, loving them with the love due to God, but the believers have greater love for God. If only the idolaters could see- as they will see when they face the torment- that all power belongs to God, and that God punishes severely. (C2:165)

Here the natural question to ask is: Why would anyone ascribe partners to God? the answer comes down to the desire to be free from the obligations and restrictions of faith......The desire to seek a religion which has no real boundaries. If you want to satisfy your natural need for faith and belief, while simultaneously, pursuing your whims and desires, the only way to fulfil these contradicting needs is to select a deity who does not assign any concrete obligations. One that allows you to do what God has prohibited, and frees you from the mandates of faith such as prayer, and alms giving.

Those who have true faith, on the other hand, know that God has ordained obligations upon us for our own good. He does not benefit from our prayer or money, nor does He obtain any advantage if we follow His path. Rather, we are the ones who benefit greatly from His mercy, His blessings and from the reward of paradise in the Hereafter. True believers have this certainty in their hearts; hence they love God with great affection.

Interestingly, a disbeliever, despite all what he or she might claim, will seek refuge in God at the desperate hour of true need. The mind and the heart can only find refuge and sanctuary with their creator. Allah says:

When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble. In this way the deeds of such heedless people are made attractive to them. (10:12)

Why wouldn't such a person call out to the partners he ascribes to God? The truth is simple: man can never cheat himself at the hour of true need.....at that time he or she will only call and hold onto the truth. Take the example of a person who claims to heal people with quackery and magic. Who does he turn to when he has a serious illness? No doubt he will rush to the hospital and choose the most esteemed medical doctor. A man can defraud many, but he does not cheat himself. Similarly, a person may seek false Gods for his or her worldly benefits, but when this person is stricken by serious trouble, he or she will seek refuge in the one true God....because each one of us instinctively knows that God is the only One who can remove adversity.

Once, while a famous poet of the 8th century was standing at the door of the Ka'ba, he heard a Bedouin supplicating to God:

"O Lord! You know that I have disobeyed you.....Your right upon me demands that I do not ask for your help you while I disobey you.....But I know in my heart that there is not deity worthy of worship other than you........who else can I turn to for help?"

The poet turned to the Bedouin and said: "Hey you! I believe that God will forgive and help you because you understood how to plead to him"

Now, we move on to the next verse of 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 23

And if you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single chapter like it- enlist whatever supporters you have other than God- if you are truthful (2:23)

God clarified that those who ascribe partners with Him do not base their argument on logic or intellect, but are merely pursuing their worldly desires. Now, He challenges them to produce the likes of the Quran – the eternal miracle of the Prophet (peace be upon him)-. Allah created the universe as a physical miracle that is easy to perceive, and the Qur'an and its message as a miracle of guidance and values. The phrase "**and if you have doubts**" means that the verse is addressed to the disbelievers and hypocrites. The believers, on the other hand, have no doubt in their hearts, rather they have certainty that the Quran is the word of God delivered to the Prophet from the heavens.

Where does the doubt of the disbelievers stem from? Are there any grounds for doubting the source of the Quran when the Messenger of God did not read nor write? How could a man, who was not known for eloquence or poetry among his people, produce this miraculous speech? How could the greatest Arab poets and masters of language fail to better him? Moreover, up until the time Muhammad received the revelation and prophethood, he had never been known to lie or cheat. In fact, Meccans, who were very keen people, had given him the title of 'the truthful and the trustworthy'. Astonishingly, these are the very people who later accused him of fabricating the Quran. Does it make sense that the

Prophet would be honest and sincere when dealing with people, yet lie about God?! This cannot be.

The Quran that came to the prophet was new in its style and delivery. It brought knowledge and revelations not known to anyone at the time. All this from an illiterate man. If he had studied from a teacher or read books related to former civilisations, then the people of Mecca, who knew him best, would have confronted him.

How, then, did this doubt penetrate into their hearts? Obviously it has entered from the door of falsehood that does not require evidence to support its case. As usual, given a little time, The truth started to inevitably slip from the mouths of the disbelievers. It showed that they had no objection whatsoever to the Quran, rather, they only disliked the fact that it was not revealed to a man from their ranks.....the ranks of the elites. God says:

They also say: "If only this Qur'an had been sent down on distinguished man of the two cities!" (43:31)

Having found no evidence or faults in the Quran, the disbelievers turned to discrediting the prophet. First they accused him of sorcery. Here we ask......If the prophet was such a brilliant magician, how come he did not cast a spell on you?

In other occasions they claimed that he was accused of being mad. A crazy person acts without logic…He or she laughs, cries and hits others without reason. This is in complete contradiction to the man they entrusted with their valuables when they travelled.......the man they called '‘the truthful, the trustworthy’. God addressed these false allegations in the following verses:

“By the blessings of your Lord, you are not mad. You will have a wage which never-fails. Indeed you are truly vast in character”.(68:2-4)

From all of the above we find that the reasons for doubt regarding the Quran or the prophet do not exist or, at best, they are not sufficient. To the contrary, the reasons for certainty are clear and supported by evidence.

The Holy Quran was preserved in the guarded slate before humans were created. And when the time came for the Quran to carry out its mission in the universe, it was sent down as a complete book from the guarded slate

to the nearest heaven. Then it was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) little by little as required to address the events and needs of the time. Thus, the expression **'sent down'** refers to the event of descending the Quran as a whole from the preserved slate to the nearest heaven. While revealing the Quran refers to delivering individual or a group of verses to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by the angle Gabriel.

Let's take a few moments to examine the words **'Our Servant'**. God divided mankind into two categories: slaves and servants. The entire creations of God in the universe are His slaves in the sense that they are not capable of going against His will and desire. While you may be able to make your own decisions and choose the actions you like......This is only possible because God has given you the freedom to do so. Even when you choose to do something that is not in line with God's guidance, you are able to do so because God has granted you the ability and the free choice.

The servants of God are those who choose to exercise this freedom of choice in accordance to God's teachings. Even when they have the desire and the ability to do something else, they curb this desire and only do what God has recommended. God holds these individuals, his servants, at very high esteem.

When you examine the Quran, you will notice that Allah refers to them and their high honour in many verses. He says:

When My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed nearmost. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me, and let them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly. (2:186)

This great privilege of being close to Allah at the time of need, and having His support and guidance is exclusive to his servants. They do what God asks of them, and abstain from what He prohibits, therefore, God responds to their prayers in the manner that is best suited for their condition. Here is another example from the Quran; God says:

When the first of these warnings was fulfilled, We sent against you servants of Ours with great force, and they ravaged your homes. That warning was fulfilled, (17:5)

Some critics of the Quran argue that the word 'servants' has been used in the Quran to describe the disbelievers. Take a look at the following verse:

On the day when the unbelievers and whatever they had been worshipping besides God will be resurrected, He will ask the idols, "Did you mislead My servants or did they themselves go astray from the right path?(25:17)

To answer their objection, we have to put this verse in context. The events of the verse take place on the day of judgment. And on that day everyone will be a servant of God, because all will be compelled to obey God in all their actions.........there is no freedom of choice anymore. Death puts an end to our desires and our choices making us subject to God's will alone. The difference between God's slaves and servants is only in this world.

As mentioned earlier, servitude is the highest degree of closeness to God any creation can obtain. Each one of us can make a choice, through our everyday actions, to obtain this high status and enjoy great honour in this world and in the hereafter. God described the prophet (peace be upon him) as *'Our Servant'* in many verses of the Quran as the following example illustrates:

Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing. (17:1)

This greatest of miracles, the miracle of ascending to the seventh heaven in soul and body and being granted access to a level even beyond where of archangel Gabriel could go, was bestowed on the prophet Muhammad....a man who achieved the perfect level of love and servitude to God. In fact, when the prophet was given a choice between being an Angle messenger, or a servant messenger, he (peace be upon him) chose the latter.

The fact that the Messenger was a human being like everybody else, raised great objection among the disbelievers since the time of revelation. This is highlighted in the following verses:

The ruling circle of those of his people who were disbelievers said, 'We do not see you as anything but a human being like ourselves. We do not see anyone following you but the lowest of us, unthinkingly. We do not see you as superior to us. On the contrary, we consider you to be liars.' (11:27)

they said, 'What? A man? Why should we follow a lone man from

amongst ourselves? That would be misguided; quite insane! (54:24)

The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, 'How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?' (17:94)

And lastly,

If you were to obey a human being like yourselves, you would, in that case, definitely be the losers. (23:34)

Hence, the human factor of the Messenger became an instrument of criticism for those who did not want to believe. Let's take a moment here to understand the requirements of prophethood. A prophet needs to be a person who had lived among his people before the divine message was revealed. He needs to be trustworthy, loved and well known in the community so his message would be accepted and followed. And at the same time, prophethood requires a person to be a role model for other. This is why it was important that a prophet is from the same creation and species as the people he is teaching. He should present the best practical example in implementing God's guidelines for those around him. If the prophet had been from different creation, then many would have complained that they cannot implement what the Lord has ordered! They would have reasoned that the Messenger is created differently, inclined towards obedience only, and has superior abilities to the average person.

Therefore, the human nature of any prophet is an absolute requirement; And the human nature of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is unquestionable. Whoever attempts to place the Prophet at a level beyond or above humanity is indeed trying to degrade the divine messages and wisdom of Allah. If God had wanted to turn the prophet, or anyone else, into an angel, he would have done so as illustrated in the following verse:

if it had been Our will, We could have made you angels, succeeding one another on earth. (43:60)

we discussed the doubts the disbelievers raise against the Quran and the prophet. Now that these issues have been addressed, God issues the following challenge: If the disbelievers claim that the Quran is not God's word, then surely they should be able to produce something like it.

Let's look at this challenge in detail:

First, when you study the Quran, you will find that Allah took a gradual approach in challenging the non-believers. Initially, He asked them to bring the likes of the entire Quran. Then, in another verse, He eased the challenge by asking them to produce only 10 chapters. God lowered the bar further and asked them to create a single chapter (also known as sura). This approach indicates to the ones being challenged that their efforts will never be successful, and that they are the target of ridicule.

Second, the phrases **'the likes of the Quran'** or **'a Chapter like it'** mean that God is challenging the disbelievers to produce a text similar to the Quran. He is not asking them to come up with an original authentic text. This lowers the bar even more to prove that the disbelievers are not competent of doing even the minimum.

And lastly, when God asks them to **‘enlist whatever supporters you have other than God’,** he wants to rob them of all excuses. The disbelievers can bring whomever they wish to help them and to judge if the verses they produce resemble the Quran or not. They are free to enlist any creation and bring forth biased witnesses. Allah generalized the term ‘**supporters you have other than God**’ to include all species and creations. This demonstrates the ultimate power and infinite knowledge of God Almighty, and leaves the disbelievers with no excuses whatsoever.

This brings us to the phrase: **‘if you are truthful’**. What does it mean to be truthful? In order for something you say to be truthful, it has to satisfy two conditions. The first one is: you say with your tongue what you truly believe in your heart. The second one is: what you say is in accordance with the reality of things. For example: If you say that ‘Walter is hardworking’, then for this statement to be truthful, there has to be a person named Walter, and he must be a hard worker. Moreover, you have to believe in your heart that Walter is a hard worker. If, on the other hand, there is no one named Walter, or if you believe that this Walter is not a hard worker, then your sentence contradicts reality and it is untrue.

Lets apply this concept to the noble verse. In order for the disbelievers to be truthful, then what they say about the Quran, or the verses they produce, must correspond to reality. In other words, the burden of proof falls on them, and if they cannot bring forth evidence of their claims, then they liars. This brings us to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 24

But if you do not - and you will never be able to - then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers (Chapter 2: Verse 24).

At the beginning of this verse, Allah is informing us of the reality of things. He says: **'But if you do not - and you will never be able to'.** Inessence, He is telling us the result of this challenge even before its completion. God, after all, is the most knowledgeable, and He is aware that the disbelievers will never be able to bring forth the likes of the Quran. Perhaps more importantly, and since this challenge is ongoing, the verse predetermines the failure of the disbelievers from the moment of revelation of these verses until the Day of Resurrection. It is a foregone conclusion.

The word '**if**' indicates choice and uncertainty, because the occurrence of one event is linked to a condition. For example, when you say to someone: 'if you study, you will succeed', then this person has a choice: to study or not to study. The outcome of success is dependent on studying. Similarly, God gave the disbelievers a choice, yet at the same time He informed them that the end result is the same regardless of the choices they make; Their failure to produce the likes of the Quran is certain. This is not because God had prevented them from trying, or restricted their choices, rather, it is because they are not capable of performing this task.

This verse is an example of the unseen matters God informed us about in the Quran. He gave us foreknowledge of what the disbelievers will and will not do in the future. In other verses God tells us about what is within their hearts as the following verse illustrates:

And they denied our signs out of malice and pride, though in their

hearts they believed that they were true. So see how was the end of evil-doers! (27:14)

The disbelievers had made the conscious decision not to accept God's message. And in order to rationalize their disbelief, they continually make up excuses and false reasons for not accepting faith. God answers these excuses with a warning. He says: **"Then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones".** Can the disbelievers who chose to ignore God signs and messages in this world do the same in the hereafter? Can they chose not to enter hellfire on the Day of Resurrection? Of course not. This warning is a reminder to all of us that our freedom of choice is temporary. If you abandon faith out of your own free will, then keep in mind that this freedom of choice is temporary and will end when you die. Can a disbeliever save him or herself from God's justice on the day of judgment? The following verses illustrate how Allah will address the people on that day:

The day when they will emerge from their graves, nothing about them will be hidden from God. 'To whom does absolute sovereignty belong today?' 'To Allah, the One, the All-paramount!' (40:16)

And in another verse:

The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another; on that Day, command will belong to God. (82:19)

Furthermore, the false Gods and desires that a person pursues in this world will offer no protection in the hereafter. God says:

They will hear: "You and what you took as gods for yourselves will become the fuel for Hell, once you are cast in." (21:98)

Here you may ask, Why are the false Gods and idols who were worshipped be cast in hellfire with the disbelievers? This is done to increase the anguish and suffering of the disbelievers. When a disbeliever enters hellfire, he or she might have the hope that their false God will come to their aid and rescue. However, when this person sees his or her idol in the fire, all hope is lost and the torment is magnified.

Here we should take a moment to examine the word '**prepared**', which means that both heaven and hellfire already exist even if we cannot see them. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Paradise was shown to me, and I could have brought you some of its fruit if I wanted". The verse and the prophet's narration should give the believer great reassurance, and the disbeliever a stern warning. When you know that heaven actually

exists, and that faith and actions will lead you to it, happiness and longing fill your heart. God says:

Those are the inheritors, Who will inherit Paradise, and live in it for ever. (23:10-11)

Before God created mankind, He created heaven and hell. God prepared a place for each one of us in hellfire and prepared another place in paradise. Those who are admitted into the fire will leave their place in paradise vacant. These empty places, in essence lost opportunities, will be granted to the believers as an inheritance in addition to their own place in paradise. So rest assured that the word ‘prepared’ in the verse means that your destination is ready, and all you have to do is make a choice and take the appropriate actions to reach your chosen destination.

Verse 25

And give glad tidings to those who have faith and do righteous deeds, that for them shall be Gardens with rivers flowing under them. When they are given fruit as provision, they will say, ‘This is what we were given before.’ But they were only given a simulation of it. There, they will have spouses of perfect purity and will remain timelessly, forever. (25:2)

After describing the destination of the disbelievers who doubt the Quran and fabricate excuses for not accepting faith, Allah presents us with a verse describing heaven. It is the style of the Quran to describe the pleasures of paradise and bring it in sharp contrast to the torment of hell in adjacent verses. This sort of comparison promotes faith within the soul. When you recite a few verses detailing punishment, and immediately recite ones describing pleasures and mercy, you become motivated to work twice as hard to succeed. In fact, your success is double. On one level, being removed from fire and escaping its torment is great success in by itself. And yet on a higher level, the success of being admitted into paradise is immense. Let's take an example from the Quran. God says:

Every soul shall taste death, and you will indeed be paid your full rewards on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is delivered from the Fire and admitted to paradise has certainly succeeded. The life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion. (3:185)

God did not say that whoever enters paradise has attained success, because that leaves out the success of being spared the torment of hell. This picture comes into full display when you read the descriptions of the day of judgment. On that day, after each person has been taken to account, a bridge will be erected across hellfire for everyone to cross. Every person will travel on this terrible bridge at a speed determined by his or her own good deeds. Some will cross it with the speed of light, while others will cross it slowly and so on. The disbelievers, on the other hand, having no good deeds to carry them across, will fall into the fire. Here you may ask: why are the believers asked to cross such a bridge? We find the answer in the following verse:

But every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled. We shall deliver those who took heed for themselves, and leave the evil-doers kneeling there. (19:71-72)

While mere entrance into paradise is a great blessing, the believers cross this bridge to witness the horrendous torment their faith has protected them from. They will sense the great blessing and immense mercy of their Lord. Likewise, when the inhabitants of hell see the people of paradise, they will feel the wrath of God upon them depriving them of this pleasure.

This verse starts with the phrase: **'and give good tidings.'** 'Good tidings' is the news of the approach of something pleasant. It is the opposite of a warning, which give the news of an upcoming terrifying matter. Thus, if you give someone good tidings, you are in fact announcing the arrival of something gratifying. This phrase is used in the Quran to deliver a message to the believers and to the disbelievers. Here is an example of a verse addressing the disbelievers:

Woe to every sinful liar, who hears God's revelations being recited to him, yet persists in his arrogance as if he had never heard them. So give him the glad tidings of a painful punishment. (45:7-8)

'Glad tidings' in this example works as sarcasm. God wants to increase the torment of the disbelievers. Thus, when they hear the phrase 'give them good tidings', they unconsciously expect good news, but, when the bad news of a painful punishment is delivered, it only serves to increase their anguish.

In the 25th verse of 'The Cow' good news is delivered to the believers carrying the beautiful promise of paradise. Allah says: **"and give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds, that for them shall be Gardens with rivers flowing under them".**

Faith is the emotional compass for our behaviour. When you have firm belief in something, you will work for it with passion. If you love teaching, for example, and you believe that a degree in education will help you reach your dream, then you will study and work hard for that degree. Every deed you and I do stems from an ideas we believe in. Similarly, faith is a belief that rests within your heart, and it is displayed when your action are in accordance with the will of God. Faith acts like a spring and the good deeds are the stream of water coming from it. Without actions, faith loses all meaning. Allah says:

Hereby God swears by time. that mankind is most definitely in loss. except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to the truth, and enjoin one another to patience. (103:1-3)

And in another verse:

And Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those devoted to God'? (41:33)

God Almighty wants us to realize that our proclamation that 'there is no deity except God and that Muhammad is His Messenger' is not enough. It must be accompanied by sincere actions. Our proclamation of faith

does not increase anything in God's dominion. Allah bears witness of His oneness of divinity. And so do the angels because they are in the presence of Allah. And then comes the testimony of those who were granted knowledge. God says:

Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him, the Almighty, the All Wise. (3:18)

God wants the believers to adhere to the doctrine of faith and practice Islam so that life can move in harmony. And as long as life's movement is upright it will be powerful and beneficial for everyone. When Islam spread to different corners of the world, the aim was not for people to accept faith for the sake of believing. It was meant for the betterment of people's lives and for the spread peace and justice.

When you act in a way that does not correspond to God's teachings, belief loses all meaning and becomes irrelevant to the society. That is why Allah always emphasises the link between faith and righteous deeds in the Quran. He says: **'those who believe and do righteous deeds'.**

Keep in mind that the opposite of 'righteous deeds' is corruption. The very least amount of righteousness that is expected of us as Muslims, and as human beings, is to leave what is right and good as it is. If you want to strengthen your faith and earn a higher degree in paradise, then make sure you do righteous deeds every chance you get.

God gives those who have faith that is expressed through righteous deeds the good news of paradise. The gardens of the Heavens is used in the plural form because paradise has many different levels, and each level has its distinct classes of bliss. God states:

Look how We favor some of them over others. But the Next World has higher ranks and greater favors. (17:21)

One of the highest levels of the heavens is called 'Al Firdous'. There are the Gardens of Eden, the Gardens of Bliss, the Gardens of Eternal Life and The Upper Most Heaven. The Gardens of Illyoon is the most luxurious and the best of them all; It has the greatest honor of being in God company; a pleasure beyond all the pleasures of the heavens.

Moreover, food and drink in paradise is not related to hunger or thirst, rather it is given according to desire and enjoyment. In the following verse, Allah is promising you something that you do not know, and

cannot see. He says:

No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them as a reward for what they have done. (32:17)

No one in the world knows what pleasures exist in paradise; nor are there any words in the human language that can express these pleasures. Thus, God used words that our intellects understand and our minds can use to approximate these pleasures. Allah started the description with the phrase: **'gardens from beneath which rivers flow'.** The word '**from**' indicates that the source of these rives is paradise itself. In other words, the springs sprout from the soil and rocks of paradise, and thus, gives its residents the added peace of mind that they control the water source and it will never be cut off, or diverted away from them. The pleasures of paradise are indeed eternal and ever-lasting.

Wherever water is plentiful, there will be plush greenery, pleasing scenery, and wonderful fruits. God says**: Anytime they are served with fruits and other provisions, they will say: "These are similar to what God was providing for us on earth".** Let's take a few moments to talk about the fruits of paradise. In this world, if you want some fruit, you have to grow it, buy it, or maybe your family will bring you some according to their choosing. In paradise, on the other hand, the fruit will approach you by itself the moment you desire it. At the mere thought of something you would like, it will instantly appear before you. This fruit, that is now in your hand, will resemble the fruits of this world in appearance, but it will be nothing like it in taste or fragrance. It may look like the apple or mango that you and I know.....Allah made it so, because he wants you to feel at ease. We are comfortable eating something that is familiar to us, while we shy away from strange looking foods.

Moreover, the food you and I eat produces waste passed through urine or stool. The food of paradise will produce no such waste. You can eat as you wish without getting full, and without the need to use to the bathroom. These great bounties: the rivers, food, fruits and much more, are the direct grants of Allah through His command 'be and it will become'. Human work and effort are not involved or required at any point.

God continues**: "The believers will have pure spouses and live in paradise forever".** A virtuous spouse is a source of comfort and pleasure. A spouse can also be the source of stress and misery. If the man or the woman initiates quarrelling and fights, has extreme jealousy, or neglects his or her duties, the result is an unhappy marriage. But in the

hereafter all of these issues will be removed by God. Hence, your spouse in the hereafter will be cleansed from everything that may disturb you. This purification will extend to all matters physical and moral removing whatever troubles you in this world. God says:

and We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: brothers, sitting on couches, face to face. (15:47)

Perhaps the most important point is saved for the end of the verse. God says: '**and live in paradise forever"**… this means that there will be no death; you will not leave this pleasure nor it will abandon you. You will have an eternal life in bliss.

Verse 26

God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a mosquito, or larger: the believers know it is the truth from their Lord, but the disbelievers say, 'What does God mean by such a comparison?' Through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebellious He makes go astray.(2:26)

God wants to clarify to the believers the Islamic curriculum that every

Muslim should pursue. Keep in mind that God does not assign any path or a curriculum to the disbelievers. When you choose to join the faith, you are, in fact, entering into a theistic contract with the Lord. And since you made that choice, you are expected to abide by God’s commandments and prohibitions even if you do not understand the wisdom behind them. Faith means to believe in the unseen, and if something is hidden from you then how can you fully realize the wisdom behind it?

Here are some questions that are often asked: What is the wisdom behind praying this way? Why do we fast? Why is Hajj at this time of the year? and so on. The wisdom behind any religious obligation is simple and straight forward: It is because Allah told us to do it. When a person equal to you in knowledge and degree issues a command, you have the full right to question and debate its merits. When, on the other hand, a command is issued by your Lord who has infinite wisdom and knowledge, then respect and obedience is obligatory upon you as a worshipper. Thus, the order of God to do something is sufficient for us to carry it out; and the order not to do something is also sufficient for us to stop doing it.

I pray because God has obligated prayer, not because it is a form of exercise or meditation. I perform ablution before praying because God has commanded me to do so, not because it is act of cleansing myself. Likewise, I fast during the month of Ramadan because God has ordained fasting upon me; I do not do it to lose weight or to feel the hunger of the poor. If prayer had been a form of exercise, then we could have replaced it with play and yoga. Similarly, if ablution had been a form of cleansing, then we could have substituted it with bathing or using hand sanitizers. If the objective of fasting was to realize the hunger of the poor, then fasting would not have been incumbent upon the poor or the hungry.

Thus, all the obligations that we practice, we only do because Allah has legislated them. We do not intend anything else besides that. Likewise, whatever has reached us of the Quran we accept as God's word. This is the faith that God wants us to adhere to and establish as a way of life.

This concept is essential to understanding the meaning of the verse that states **“God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or larger…”.** When Allah presented the example of a mosquito, the disbelievers confronted it with ridicule and dismissal. How can God use the example of a mosquito, a weak and annoying creation that you can squish with your finger? Why didn't God use the example of an elephant or a lion? They said: **"what does God**

mean by such a comparison?” Unfortunately, they did not realize that the creation of something as small as a mosquito is a great miracle. God fitted this tiny creature with all of the organs necessary for life. It has two eyes, and a mouthpart -called proboscis- which is capable of piercing the human skin and drawing blood to feed on. A mosquito also has legs, wings, a reproductive cycle and all the organs required for living. The smaller the body, the more precision it requires for its creation.

This applies to our own inventions in life. When the first mainframe computer was invented, its size was huge filling up several rooms while having minimal computing power. As scientists and innovators excelled, the size of computers began to shrink until one can now fit in the palm of your hand. In fact, as every invention gets refined over time, its size and weight decreases. This requires talent and constant technical and academic progress. Therefore, when Allah presented the example of a mosquito, He intended to draw our attention towards the precision of the creation.

The disbelievers did not pay heed to this meaning, rather they wanted to view God's word through their simple worldly view. The believers, on the other hand, received God's word with an open heart. While many may have not understood the wisdom behind this example, they accepted it because it came from Allah. True faith in God is to believe in whatever comes from Him whether we understand it or not. God says:

Indeed we have brought them a book explaining it in knowledge, a guidance and a mercy to a people who believe. What are they waiting for but the fulfillment of its final prophecy? On the Day it is fulfilled, those who had ignored it will say, ‘Our Lord’s messenger spoke the truth. Is there anyone to intercede for us now? Or can we be sent back to behave differently from the way we behaved before?’ They will really have squandered their souls, and all they invented will have deserted them. (7:52-53)

Your reception of the Quran, and your level of benefit from it, are directly related to the level of faith within your heart. So when the disbelievers questioned: ‘**What does God mean by such a comparison?**’, God answered ‘**through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebellious He makes go astray**’.

In order to understand the true meaning of the word 'rebellious' in this verse, we should look at the Arabic source of the word. The word 'فَاسِقِينِ' originated from the desert environment surrounding the Arabs at the

time. When a date ripens on a palm tree, its skin is attached to the core of the fruit. As the date ages, the skin separates from the fruit making it very easy to peel. The word 'فسق' describes the detachment of the skin from its natural healthy place. Similarly, Allah used this word to describe a person who distances him or herself away from God's teachings; A person who does not observe God's commandments or prohibitions; In essence, rebelling against faith.

When you look around you, you will find that all creations are carrying out their mission in this universe with faithful precision. The sun, the moon, the soil and even insects perform their duties in this world because they are subjected by God's will. These creation do not have the free will to make a choice or to rebel. Man, on the other hand, having free will, can choose to distance himself from God's curriculum. The result is corruption to society, and the destruction of the environment that we see all around us. Take a moment observe the undisturbed forest, the planets, and even the microbes, that have not been corrupted by man, you will find beauty and order, and you will appreciate the miracle of God's creation, and great benefits of adhering to His guidance.

Verse 27

Those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth- these are the losers (2:27)

We explained the concept of faith. The concept of implementing God's teachings even if we do not understand the wisdom behind them. We accept whatever comes from Allah because He is our Lord.......we do not engage it through the prism of doubt and argument. Thus, the wisdom behind any religious obligation is complete trust and faith in Allah.

God Almighty informed us that the rebellious are those who have distanced themselves from His path. This verse describes the three main characteristics of the rebellious. First, they break God’s covenant after its solemn binding. Second, they sever the bonds God commanded to be joined, and lastly, they cause disorder and corruption on earth. Because of their actions, God made the judgment against them that they are losers. When a person exchanges God's legislation with that of his or her personal desires, he or she will pay a hefty price . God says:

They have bought error in exchange for guidance, so their trade reaps no profit, and they are not rightly guided. (2:16)

God’s guidance is what leads us towards the ever-lasting pleasure in paradise. Those who choose to trade it for short-lived worldly gain will lose themselves in the fires of hell.

God says:

Indeed Allah has bought from the faithful their souls and their possessions for paradise to be theirs: they fight in the way of Allah, kill, and are killed. A promise binding upon Him in the Torah and the Evangel and the Quran. And who is truer to his promise than Allah? So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him, and that is the great success. (9:111)

True believers exchanged their wealth and their souls for God's company in heaven. As for the disbelievers and the hypocrites, they abandoned God's guidance for corruption in life. They did not keep their promise to the Lord. And if you are dishonest with yourself, and with God, how can you be trusted when dealing with people? Keeping one's word and honoring one's covenants and promises are one of the sure signs of faith. God says:

And do not touch the property of the orphans except for bettering it, until they come of age; And fulfill the covenants; indeed all covenants are accountable. (17:34)

and in a verse about the disbelievers:

We found that most of them did not honor their commitments; We found that most of them were rebellious (7:102)

Here you may naturally ask: What is the covenant that God is referring to in the 26th verse of 'The Cow'? Allah is referring to the innate faith within us.......the instinct and longing every human has for a higher power. God instilled this drive for faith and longing to Him in all of us, and He took an oath from entire mankind to seek His path. Allah refers to this covenant in the following verse:

And when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,' (7:172)

Each and every one of us took this oath before our Lord. Sadly, with time, negligence and carelessness found their way into the hearts of many, and slowly broke this covenant. Many took deities besides God. Keep in mind that God wants you to honor your word and too keep all your promises, even if a promise is made to a non-believer as the following verse illustrates:

Except those idolaters with whom you have a treaty, who have not failed you in the least, nor helped anyone against you. Fulfill your obligations to them during the term of the treaty. God loves those who take heed for themselves. (9:4)

We can take a historical example to the value of a believer's word and covenant. Allah disassociated Himself, the prophet and the believers from the disbelievers and idolaters in regards to faith. He forbade them from entering His sacred house in Mecca. Yet at the same time, God honored the treaty that existed between the Muslims and non-Muslims that allowed the non-Muslims to enter the Holy places. God instructed the believers to implement this treaty to its full term.

When you consider the value God placed on a covenant with the disbelievers, you will begin to appreciate the grave sin a person makes when breaking a covenant with God. The disbelievers have indeed rebelled against Gods religion and His covenant. How can they be trusted to keep their promise to you or anyone else? Thus, the first and foremost quality of the rebellious is that they do not honor covenant with their Creator or the creation.

We now move to the second attribute described in the verse: those **"who**

sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined" The bond in the verse refers to family and kinship. It is a sacred bond that Allah ordered us to keep. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said during the farewell pilgrimage:"*Everyone is from Adam* and *Adam*is from dust". We all share the same ancestors, thus, God wants us to take notice of our humanity and respect our relations to one another. Your circle begins with your immediate family, extended family, and then expands to include your neighbors, your local community, society, all the believers, and finally the world as a whole. This is the brotherhood that God wants us to acknowledge and honor at every level.

Allah wants us to keep excellent ties with our family and relatives. So if you break ties with your parents or your family members, not only will you be in violation of your social responsibility, but you would also be violating God's command. Keeping good ties with relatives creates a social solidarity among human beings. For instance, in a healthy society, if you are stricken by a calamity, your family and relatives will be first at your side trying to relieve your troubles. This unity between family members makes each one of them stronger in facing such events. No one will feel lost or abandoned if he or she is united with the family, united with the neighborhood and the society as a whole.

Sadly, nowadays, especially in Western societies, many family bonds have been broken, and as a result, depression, anxiety and other personal afflictions are widespread. When a person feels isolated, he or she may turn to alcohol or drugs for solace......whole generations can be lost when families disintegrate. When we see deviations spreading among the young today, we should not just blame them for it; rather we should look first towards the parents who may have neglected their children chasing after material gains. A son or a daughter who has a poor family atmosphere loses balance in life.

God wants the believers to be affectionate, united and free from the major problems that destroy life. You can start by taking care of your parents, your children and your spouse. If you are there for your family members in their distress, God will be there for you at your time of trouble. Next, try building bridges with your neighbors and your community regardless of their faith, and finally, make sure you reach out for your fellow Muslims near and far. We can all use each other's help.

Let's look at the third quality that God described the rebellious people with: those '**who spread corruption on earth**'. When we think about

God's creation, we should look at it through the context of these verses:

Glorify the name of your Lord the Most High, who created all things in due proportion; who determined their destinies and guided them (87:1-3)

This means that all creation is guided by Allah towards a goal determined by Allah. Human beings have the added advantage of free-choice. However, this is a double-edged sword that can cause corruption in life if misused.

It is truly a great mercy from God that most creations are obliged to carry their mission without any deviation. The sun, stars, water, soil and the entire universe, except for humans and jinn, operate according to an accurate system and a finite plan. They follow God's command and have no choice of their own. We see that the entire universe is operating like clockwork. And in order for our own lives to enjoy the same balance and beauty, we should exercise our freedom of choice according to God's recommendations. Having free will does not imply that you can distance yourself from God without consequences. Allah, after all, possesses the attribute of compulsion, and could have simply created you forced to obey Him. God gave you the freedom of choice so you may turn to Him out of love and not by force. Your freedom of choice can earn you great rewards and infinite pleasure in heaven if you use it correctly in life.

Thus, each one of us has the choice to believe or to not believe. The choices that you and I make reflect the level of love in our hearts for Allah. When your love for God outweighs your love and desires for worldly matters, you can easily bring yourself to carry out God’s teachings. Sadly, many have taken this freedom of choice for granted and used it to cause corruption on earth.

Let's take a few moments to look at corruption in detail. Corruption happens when you swap the commands ‘do’ and ‘do not do’ with each other. In essence, you are throwing life out of balance. If there is no law and order......if each individual does what he or she likes disregarding the rights of others, chaos and conflicts occur. Consider this example: suppose that while you were walking in your neighborhood, you notice water leaking from a pipe of a newly constructed building. The paint, and the wall of the building are now damaged. Even if you do not own this building, you will definitely feel displeasure and hurt by this sight. It indicates to you that someone did not do their job properly. A worker may have used a defective pipe, or the plumber may have installed the water valve in a rush. One worker's dishonesty through this single act of

corruption had tarnished the appearance of an entire building.

Similarly, moral corruption tarnishes the fabric of society. The more dishonest people are in their professions and dealings, the more mistrust spreads in the community. Soon, no person feels comfortable or safe when dealing with others. Take the example of a merchant who cheats people. He may sell you a defective or expired product. His intention is to make a quick profit and bring immediate benefit to himself; however, in reality, he has caused corruption and spread mistrust. When a person is greedy in the quest for money, power, or status, he or she will not think twice about transgressing over other peoples' rights, and may even harm those standing in his or her way. This is where misery and evil find their way into society and throw life out of balance.

Corruption in society is relatively easy to spot. One of its clearest signs is the spread of cronyism.....in essence entrusting tasks and responsibilities to those who are not fit. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *'The hour of judgment is near when you see authority given to those who do not deserve it'.* In a society where cronyism is rife, the person who masters the art of hypocrisy reaches high status, and the one who is honest, hard-working and masters his task gains nothing. The result is a group of ignorant hypocrites running the affairs of the people into ruin. When hard work, and people's rights lose their value, the whole society transforms into a jungle filled with non-producers. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *'Whoever appoints a man as a leader of a group, while there is amongst them someone who is more qualified, then he has certainly betrayed the trust of God and His messenger'.*

Another sign of corruption is the destruction of the environment. When individuals and companies put their immediate short-term benefit above all else, they lose sight of the balance of the world around them. Trees are cut haphazardly, and industrial waste is dumped into rivers.......People and nature are exploited in order to gain the highest advantage. The end result is a world filled with corruption and injustice making life a never-ending series of miseries.

The only solution to remove corruption from society is to adopt a system of governance that is not based on greed and desires. A system that is fair and not inclined to serve some while exploiting others. The only source of such balance and fairness comes from the one who free of any need, the most knowledgeable, the most merciful: God Almighty.

Through religious teachings, Allah has laid down an inclusive policy that encompasses all peoples' affairs in dealing with each other and with their

surroundings. Those who study Islam can appreciate the extent of God's concern with preserving and advancing the affairs of people, animals and the environment. Shamefully, we have abandoned this system and walked away flopping in the darkness of ignorance.

This brings us to the end of the verse. God says about those who break their covenant, sever their family ties, and spread corruption: **'these are the losers'**. Here you may ask: what have they lost? They have lost their world, the hereafter and most importantly, themselves. Each one of us has two lives: A short worldly life filled with hardships, and an everlasting life in the hereafter. A person who exchanges the eternal life, in all its eternal pleasure, with the life of this world, which has no guarantees, is in fact a loser. Remember that your life, no matter how long it lasts, is very short. Thus if you disregard the final destination, the inevitable fact that you will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment to meet your Lord and be brought to account, then surely you would have lost yourself and made the punishment of God incumbent upon yourself.

This loss is not temporary, nor can it be made up for; It is an eternal loss, and thus carries with it great regret. God Almighty states:

We have warned you of imminent torment, on the Day when every person will see what their own hands have sent ahead for them, when the disbeliever will say, 'If only I were dust!' (78:40)

When the disbelievers see the horrors of the punishment, and realize the enormity of the loss which they subjected themselves to, each one of them will wish that he or she were mere dust. Sadly, remorse will not avail anyone that day. Faith and mindfulness of God are the foundation of life and salvation, and without it, all is lost. God says:

Say: 'Shall I inform you of the greatest losers in their actions? whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work? It is those who disbelieve in their Lord's messages and deny that they will meet Him.' Their deeds come to nothing: on the Day of Resurrection We shall give them no weight. (18:103-105)

Take a moment to ask yourself: How much time do you spend each day planning, working, and preparing for worldly matters? If you are a parent, how much do you invest in your children's education and in getting them ready to earn a good living? All this work and energy is put in preparation for the conceived future......a future which is uncertain because death can overcome anyone regardless of age and health. There are no guarantees in life......any person can get sick, can lose his or her

job, or end up with an education that is worthless.

Contrast that with the absolute certainty that you and I will meet our Lord on the Day of Resurrection. Each one of us will be taken into account regarding our deeds. Now, let's ask ourselves the same questions. How much time do you spend each day planning, working, and preparing for the hereafter? If you are a parent, how much do you invest in your children's faith? Only a few put effort in encouraging their children to pray, adhere to honesty and the deeds which bring one closer to God. The choices you make every day, and the priorities you set for yourself will determine if you will be among the true winners or losers in the hereafter.

Verse 28

How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you back to life, and then to Him you will be returned. (Chapter 2: Verse 28)

Generally, the word 'How' is used to inquire about a method or about the condition of something. But in this verse God, the most knowledgeable, is not inquiring. He is asking a rhetorical question about a matter that should not occur. How can anyone disbelieve in God after all the evidence mentioned in the previous verses regarding the creation of the heavens, earth and humans? Thus, the question in the verse is for the purpose of expressing astonishment and for scolding the disbelievers.

For example, you can scold your son, and show your surprise at his behavior by asking him: ‘How can you be so rude to your mother?’ In reality, you are telling your son that his actions are not acceptable and should not have happened.

God follows this rhetorical question with the all apparent truth. He says: **‘when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die’**. The disbelievers may argue against the fact that they are causing corruption, severing family ties, and not following what God has commanded, however, there is no argument regarding life and death. Allah created us from non-existence, and no one has ever claimed to have created himself or anyone else. Even Prophet Muhammad's most vehement enemies did not dispute this point. The domain of life and death belongs to God alone. The creation from non-existence is a reality proven by science and evidence, while death is a reality witnessed by all of us throughout our lives.

The issue of death is powerful evidence that confronts the disbelievers and atheists alike. A person may argue that human intelligence is sufficient to promote and maintain life, and that there is nothing beyond the physical world such as souls. To those we reply: He who controls life, must also be able to control death. In other words, he who can create, and maintain life, should also easily master and prevent death. The arguments for life mostly center around recent scientific advances. Take in vitro fertilization for example. It is one of the most popular processes for treating infertility. It involves retrieving an egg from a woman’s womb, then inseminating it with the man's sperm. Afterwards, the fertilized egg is transferred back into the woman’s womb. Some disbelievers point to such procedures as a form of creation, and proof that science can overcome nature and create life. Let's look at the facts behind such claims. This process, and all others, start from God’s creation, namely: the egg from the female and the sperm from the male. All the doctor does is facilitate the process of insemination. Facilitation is far from creation. They name the child born through this process a test tube baby. As if a tube can create a child!

Here is a challenge: if you possess life and the power to create, then use your power to prevent one single person from dying. Do not spend thousands trying to treat infertility, the success of which cannot be guaranteed, show your skill by keeping one person alive.

Our life in this world is like an interlude between two parentheses. The first parenthesis is God creating us and bringing us into existence, and the second parenthesis is the end of our humanity through death. The

journey of life is what we have between these two boundaries. The beginning and end belong to Allah.

When man finds himself alive, he has no way of knowing how this came to be. It is out of God's mercy and love that He informed and approximated to us the events of creation so our minds do not feel helpless. Allah says:

O people! If you are in doubt about the resurrection, consider that We indeed created you from dust, then from a drop of seminal fluid, then from a clinging mass, then from a fleshy tissue, partly formed and partly unformed, so that We may manifest Our power to you. We establish in the wombs whatever We wish for a specified term, then We bring you forth as infants, then so that you may come of age. There are some of you who are taken away, and there are some of you who are relegated to the nethermost age, so that he knows nothing after having possessed some knowledge. And you see the earth torpid, yet when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells, and grows every delightful kind(22:5)

and in another verse:

We created man from the finest extract of clay (23:12)

God says:

Then just ask the disbelievers what they think: Are they the more difficult to create, or the other creations whom We have created surely, We have created them out of a sticky clay! (37:11)

then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of ?esh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with ?esh, and later We made him into other forms—glory be to God, the best of creators!(23:14)

And lastly,

So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.' (38:72)

In the previous verses God informed us of the stages of creation that none of us had witnessed. Death, on the other hand, is here for all of us to witness. In fact, God presents death as evidence to support his message about the stages of creation that we did not see.

Let's clarify this point. Death is the opposite of life, it is the end that

negates life. And when an event negates another, it usually happens in the exact opposite order. For example, the construction of a building starts from the foundation at the bottom progressing to the top floor; whiledemolition starts from the top floor down. Similarly, the last mile you drive to get into Paris is the first mile you travel when begin your journey back home.

Let's apply this concept to life and death. God described creation as beginning from dust. First water was mixed with dust which then turned into mud. The mud was left until its color changed and it became clay. The clay was left to dry which then turned into sounding clay. After that it was shaped into the form of a human. Then God Almighty breathed His spirit into him and made him a complete human.

In death, the spirit is extracted from the physical body first as it was last to enter the body. Afterwards, the body will solidify and decays to become clay-like. Then the water that was mixed into it will evaporate and turn the remnants into dust. Thus, death which is the opposite of life occurs in accordance with the stages that God Almighty informed us of.

Once you have full faith in God, in life and death, Allah presents you with the next part of the verse. He says: **'then to Him you will be returned'** meaning that He will resurrect you and take you to account. The disbelievers, atheists and materialists often deny the issue of resurrection. Throughout the ages, they use the same old excuses for their claim. God says:

Yet they say: "There is nothing but the life of this world. We die and we live, and only time annihilates us." Yet they have no knowledge of this: They only speculate. (45:24)

It is natural for a person who acts without regard to accountability to wish that he or she will not be resurrected and asked about his or her actions. However, anyone who has doubt about resurrection should Keep in mind that the one who created you from non-existence is fully capable to bring you back to life. God says:

He is the One who originates creation and will do it again- this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise. (30:27)

Recreating what had existed, in essence restoring the old model, is far easier than creating something from nothing. God says addressing the

disbelievers:

He draws comparisons for Us, and forgets his own creation. He says, 'Who shall revive the bones when they have decayed?'Say, 'He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation. (36:78-79)

Therefore, resurrection is easier than creation. Allah, who has perfect knowledge of every particle the earth bears, will restore everything and everyone on the Day of Resurrection. God further answers any doubters with the example of creating the earth and the heavens. He says:

The creation of the heavens and earth is far greater than the creation of mankind. But most people do not know it. (40:57)

So when you read: **'then to Him you will be returned',** you should feel great assurance in your faith in God, and in resurrection. To Him belongs the beginning of life, and to Him belongs the end. Isn't it logical then that you and I should dedicate our life, that lies in between our creation and our death, to God? Shouldn't we live it according His teachings? Interestingly, Allah has kept the place, time, and reason for our death hidden so that we may expect it at any moment. This should instill within us the urgency to do righteous deeds at every moment of life. No one's life is guaranteed, not even for a single hour. Death strikes the old, the young, the sick and the healthy alike. Thus, it is necessary for all of us to continually do good deeds so death does not befall us while we are defiant.

How does this faith, the faith that the beginning and the end belong to our creator, affect our lives? When the fact of resurrection becomes certain in the heart of a person, it drives him or her to adhere to God's path and to live a life of righteousness and justice. Not only will this lead the believer to paradise, but it will also make him or her feel tranquil and content through life's troubles. For example, if you have true faith in Allah, and you know that to Him belongs life and death, you will not agonize over who will take care of your family and children in case of your death. God does not forget those who remember Him. The deeds of a parent will reflect upon his or her children after death. God says addressing those caring for orphans:

Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern; let them be mindful of God and speak out for justice. (4:9)

The person who has full faith in God feels content with life's unexpected

troubles, and has full knowledge that good work and patience will be fully rewarded in the hereafter. Contrast that tranquility with the constant worry, fear, and rush the disbelievers have. If a person has nothing to believe in beyond this world, he or she will fight tooth and nail for every small bit or wealth and status. Moreover, any set back, trouble or loss will feel like the end of the world. God says:

As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty takes for water till he reaches it to find that there was nothing, and finds God with him who settles his account, for God is swift at the reckoning. (24:39)

Imagine the surprise and the regret of a disbeliever when the truth of the hereafter becomes apparent.

‘**To him you will be returned**’ has two recitals. They differ by a single tone. The recital "???????????" indicates that returning to God happens against the persons will. Hence, this recital applies to the disbelievers and all who deny the hereafter. The second reading "????????"refers to the believers who look forward, and prepare for meeting their Lord, and it is accordingly translated as ‘**To him you will return**’

Verse 29

It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things (Chapter 2: Verse 29).

In the previous verse God informed us that to Him belongs life, death,

and resurrection. Now, He turns our attention to the fact that whatever exists on earth also belongs to Him. You and I do not have true ownership of our belongings and private property, rather all these things are under our temporary custody, and everything will eventually change hands and be the property of someone else.

God blessed us with the great bounty of life. However, the gift of life is in need of constant nourishment and care in order to survive and thrive. Thus, the supply of blessings from Allah to the creation must also continue. These blessings, however, are only of use to us while we are alive. Always keep in mind that the things around you are subjected to your will and are here for your service. This is not through your own capability, rather, it is through the will of God. Once death overtakes you, you can no longer benefit from the things around you. Make sure to use these bounties in accordance to God's guidance, as you will be asked about them on the day of judgment.

Lets turn our attention to the word '**created**'. God says:

I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation. I would not take as helpers those who lead others astray. (18:51)

None of us witnessed the creation of the universe. And since we did not witness the creation of the heavens, earth or the creation of ourselves, we should take this information from the creator Himself. Whatever comes to us from a source other than God is misguidance and falsehood. Nowadays, there aremany researches who present their view on the creation of the heavens, earth and humans. All these views are mere theories, many of them contradictory, and cannot compete with reality. God says referring to those whomislead others: '**I would not take as helpers those who lead others astray'**. Weak and speculative narratives are not the same as reality.

Keep in mind that while we may not understand creation, we can still fully benefit from it. This is similar to how you benefit from the electricity at your house even if you do not fully understand how it works. Likewise, our lack of knowledge about the process of God’s creation does not deprive us from reaping the benefits of the universe. Our lack of precise knowledge does not harm or decrease our benefit.

It is by God's command that the universe is subjected to serve and not to rebel against mankind. The first question that comes to mind is: How about all the natural disasters that happen? How about the floods,

volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and so on? We answer that these rare events are meant to remind us that earth is not subjugated by our own power, technology, or intelligence. Everything in the universe is subject to the infinite divine power and wisdom of God that transcends causes and effects. God Almighty says:

Can they not see how, among the things made by Our hands, We have created livestock they control,Whom We made subservient to them so that some of them they ride and some they eat? (36:71-72)

Ironically, you see that animals have perceptions beyond our own. Many sense the coming of an earthquake, for example, before it occurs. They flee the area to safety, while man, with his superior intelligence is completely unaware.

The phrase '**all that is on the earth**' encompassesall life forms, materials, objects, and even what we -human beings- have invented and manufactured. Mankind has not created anything from non-existence, rather, we use the materials available to us to produce and build things. For example, let's consider a grain of wheat. Where did we bring it from? Surly, it came from last year's harvest. And where did last year's harvest come from? From the harvest of the year before and so on. This sequence continues until we reach the very first grain of wheat which came directly from Allah. Even those crops that are engineered, or came to be through the process of evolution, all started from God's creation. The same logic applies to human beings. Our lineage reaches back to the first male and female created by God. Everything began with Him Almighty.

In the light of advancements, rising civilizations and new inventions, some people have come to question creation. Wasn't all of modern life our own creation? Well, the answer is simply: no. We, as a species, have used the intellect given to us by God, to shape the materials created by God into new forms and inventions. We have yet to make something from nothing. God, on the other hand, is the one who creates from nothing, and sets the laws for multiplication and procreation. God says:

Consider the seeds you sow in the ground, Is it you who make it germinate or are We the Germinator?, If We wished We could have made it broken stubble. You would then be left devoid of crops, distraught (56:63-66)

It is true that a farmer plows the ground and sows the seeds. He or she may even take extensive care of the plant, develop irrigation methods, and use fertilizers and other chemicals for optimum crop. But none of these actions create the actual plant from scratch. After all, do we plant

our crops in an earth that is not a creation of God? Do we water our crops with water other than the one God poured from the sky?

These are many things that we have discovered, and many more still hidden in this universe that we have yet to discover. God created them since the beginning of creation with precise knowledge and planning. They remain concealed in the universe until God reveals their secret to those people who are searching. Take, for example, whatever exists underground of raw materials and treasures. We did not invent or create oil or minerals, rather these blessings remained undiscovered until the time came for them to play their role in life. Allah created and deposited all the elements in exact proportion as needed to sustain and advance life until the last day.

We will focus on the phrase **'then He turned to the sky'**. Whenever you read or you come across one of God actions or attributes, you should always take it within the context of the following verse: God says:

There is nothing whatever like Him. (42:11)

When matters are related to God's Being, always keep in mind, that nothing is like Him. For example, you may physically turn to face the sky, or you may direct your attention to the sky, but when you read the verse relating to Allah turning to the sky, you must know that God's action is nothing similar to yours or to any other creations.

Let's look at this point in more detail. God is alive, and you are alive. Is your life similar to His? God has knowledge and so do you, but is your knowledge like His? God is capable and you are capable. Does your ability resemble that of God's? Of course not! Hence, when you recite the words such as **'He turned to the sky'** or**'The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His Face.'**do not regard them with your logic and worldly understanding, rather, always remember the verse **'There is nothing whatever like Him'.**

The human mind, even our collective knowledge as a species, can never understand, or encompass the reality related to God's Being. Therefore, we take verses of the Quran such as '**He turned to the sky**', or **'Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to Allah: the hand of Allah is above their hands.'**exactly as God intended. We take the prophet's narrations that are related to God's being and actions exactly as God intended. In each of these instances, were the matter is above our comprehension, take a moment to stop and say 'glorified be

God, there is nothing like Him'.

Another issue to consider is God's attributes. Attributes such as the most merciful, the creator, the generous, the truth and many more. These are attributes of perfection that are ever present and never change. In other words, these attributes existed before whatever is related to them came into existence. Let's clarify this point with a few examples. Allah is the provider, and always has been. This is true even before the existence of those to whom He gives provisions for. If God had not been a provider then how was He able to provide for the first creation? Similarly, Allah is the most merciful even before any creation was present to receive this mercy. He Almighty created this universe with the perfection of all His attributes, and these attributes will remain long after all creation ceases to exist. Most importantly, the attribute of oneness and the attribute of lordship were ever present even before Allah created those who worship Him. God says:

God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him, the Almighty, the All Wise.(3:18)

Allah testified that there is no deity except Him before any other creation witnessed the Oneness of His Divinity. He testified to His oneness before He created the angels and before He created those who have true Knowledge. Thus, the testimony in the verse: **'God bears witness that there is no god but Him'**is the strongest of testimonies and the pure essence of monotheism. Allah is in no need for the testimony of humans, angles or any other beings.

At the end of the verse and after talking about the creation of earth and the heavens, God says: '**it is He who has knowledge of all things.'** The phrase **'all things'** means thatnot even a single atom from His dominion is out of His knowledge. The universe does not function without His permission or will. Allah is All-knowing of every particle on earth, every particle of life and all particles of the universe as the following verse illustrates:

'O my son, if it should be but the weight of one grain of mustard-seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God shall bring it forth; surely God is All-subtle, All-aware. (31:16)

God's perfect knowledge of all that is within the heavens and the earth including each and every atom and particle, extends into the infinite

future. He knows what will become of these things till the end of time. Moreover, God Almighty knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth and what will become of them until the day of resurrection. Allah says:

There is nothing whatever like Him. (42:11)

Verse 30

When your Lord told the angels, 'I am putting a successor on earth,' they said, 'How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?' but He said, 'I know what you do not.' (Chapter 2, Verse 30)

In the previous verses, God informed us that He created the entire universe. Now, He presents the story of those He created to build and look after earth. The first story in the Quran is that of the first human: Adam (peace be upon him). God says:

We narrate their story to you in all truth.(18:13)

The word 'truth' indicates that there are many false accounts of history. Allah wants to differentiate between His narrations and those of storytellers and historians that may be filled with additions, omissions and fallacies. The word 'narration' is derived from the Arabic verb '?? ?????' which means to track footsteps. When you track someone's footsteps in the sand or the snow, you will be able to follow the same

path they took, and reach the same destination. And as long as God, the all knowing, is the narrator of the stories in the Quran, then these stories represent the perfect truth as it exactly happened. Keep in mind that these stories are not for pastime or entertainment, rather, each has a moral lesson, or an important fact that Allah wants us to learn. At times the stories were aimed to strengthen the Prophet's resolve and at other times the aim is to strengthen the resolve of the believers and educate them. In fact, you can always turn to the stories in Quran to gain the calm and strength you need to face life's difficulties. God says:

So We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm and in these accounts truth has come to you, as well as lessons and reminders for the believers. (11:120)

All these narrations fall under what we call history. Sometimes history links certain events with a specific period of time, and in other instances, history tells us about a person rather than an event. This often presents a problem: if you read the history of any single event, you will notice that it is often told from the biased view point of the narrator. For this reason, one historical narration may differ significantly from the other. The history and experiences of the crusades, for example, will vary greatly between Christian and Muslim narrators.

The narrator of the Holy Quran is Allah, therefore, the stories in the Quran are told in their pure unbiased form. Their lessons are timeless and can be applied over and over as history tends to repeat itself. Take the story of Pharaoh, for example, as it applies to every ruler who transgresses and subjugates others, while glorifying himself. The account of the people of the cave gives strength and guidance to every group that is prosecuted and terrorized for its faith in God. Similarly, the story of prophet Joseph (peace be upon him) gives us insight into the breakdown of family ties when jealousy and the whispers of Satan are allowed to foster. The story of Zul-Qarnain is an example of how God guides and supports just rulers who intend to reform and improve the life of others. There is also the story of the people of Prophet Shuaib who cheated in all their business dealings.

From the short list above, you can probably see many examples that apply to your life today. How many contemporary Pharaohs can you think of? How many families are broken from jealousy and malice? How many societies are suffering from widespread corruption and dishonesty? Thus, it is for these very reasons that Allah narrated the stories in the Quran. In fact, many stories are narrated either with anonymous characters, or with characters that are identified only by their first name.

God wants you to identify with these stories and assign them to current events in life. He did not specify the Pharaoh at the time of Moses, nor did He mention who were the people of the cave or who was the owner of the two gardens and so on. This should draw your attention that the particular person in the narration is not the objective, rather, the importance lies in the events and the messages we can learn from these events. So do not occupy your mind by wondering who was the Pharaoh at the time of Prophet Moses, or who was the historic leader named Zul-Qarnain and so on. God, the all wise, made these people anonymous because He wants you to focus on the wisdom behind the story.

There is, however, one exception to this rule: It is the story of Jesus son of Mary and Mary the daughter of Imran, both -peace be upon them- are identified by their full name. Why is it so, you may ask? It is because their story is a miracle that will never be repeated. God identified them by their full name so there would be no confusion, in case a woman should claim that she bore a child without a man like Virgin Mary.

If you take time to read several chapters of the Quran, you may get the impression that some stories are repeated over and again. However, upon closer examination, you will notice that while one part of the story is mentioned in a chapter, other parts are mentioned in different chapters. Each verse presents a new situation or circumstance absent elsewhere. Thus, if you want to have the full story, you should collect all the verses of the Noble Quran narrating it.

Let's take an example from the largest story mentioned in the Quran: The story of Prophet Moses. God says:

We inspired Moses' mother, saying, 'Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river: do not be afraid, and do not grieve, for We shall return him to you and make him a messenger.' (28:7)

And in a different chapter:

We inspired your mother, saying, 'Put him in a wooden box and cast it in the river. The river will cast it on the bank. An enemy of Ours, and his, will retrieve it.' We bestowed Our love on you that you may be reared under Our eyes. (20:38-39)

At first glance, you may think that this is repetition..........Let's pause and take a closer look. The first verse states: **'We inspired Moses' mother, saying, 'Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river'.** This segment shows how God is preparing Moses' mother

for the upcoming events. It has a slow gentle flow as Allah gives the baby and his mom time to suckle and bond in preparation for the mounting threat. The verse continues with: '**do not be afraid, and do not grieve, for We shall return him to you and make him a messenger.'** In essence, Allah is reassuring the mother that her future actions will not result in pain and grief because He will protect her baby. God gives her the good news that not only will He return Moses back to her, but He will also appoint him as a messenger.

Contrast that with the second verse that highlights the events as they are unfolding, The narration takes a new style turning words rapidly to convey the urgency of the moment. God says **'Put him in a wooden box and cast it in the river. The river will cast it on the bank.**' Here, we are given the additional information that Moses was placed in a chest and that Allah ordered the water to carry this chest onto the shore of Pharaoh's estate. We also find out that that Pharaoh will care for Moses only to end up with mutual enmity between them. This animosity will be long lasting because it is felt by both parties. All this is new information absent from the first verse. Then we run across a third verse that completes the scene. God says:

Pharaoh's household picked him up—later to become an enemy and a source of grief for them: Pharaoh, Haman, and their armies were wrongdoers (28:8)

As you can see, different verses and chapters complement rather than duplicate each other. Each verse contributes to the story to give us a complete picture.

Here you may ask: why didn't the story of Moses appear complete in a single chapter? Recall that the purpose of these stories is to strengthen the resolve of our Prophet (peace be upon him) and the believers', and to remind us of the lessons and wisdom behind the story. Hence, God mentioned parts of the story here and there so that it may perform this task. Similar is the case of the story of Adam. It has been mentioned in several chapters, all of which collectively work to provide us with the complete story, while at the same time each individual verse carries a wisdom proper for its place and time.

Allah wants us to know the story of the human race, in essence, how we came into existence. Thus, we are presented with the story of the first human: Adam (peace be upon him). God spoke about the substance from

which Adam was created, and the path laid for him. He told us about the conversation that took place with the angels when God pointed out that Adam will be the successor on land. We are also informed about the conversation that took place between God and Satan when Satan refused to prostrate with the angles. Perhaps most importantly, God wants you to know the arguments of your enemy, Satan, and his constant efforts to find a way into the hearts of the believers since the time of Adam.

The verse starts with God informing the angels that He will create a successor on earth. Let's take a moment here to discuss the question: Was Adam created as an individual successor? or was the whole progeny, enveloped in him until the day of resurrection, the intended successors? God says:

We created you and then formed you and then We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam,' and they prostrated – except for Satan. He was not among those who prostrated. (7:11)

The word 'you' in this verse is translated from the Arabic Quranic origin which is plural, meaning that it includes Adam and his progeny. Through this, God points out that within Adam ,who was the first creation, are the traits of all his descendants through heredity until the last day. You, and every person you know has inherited a particle or a molecule from Adam. The children of Adam inherited directly from their father, and the generation after them took a part from the living cells and genome that Adam deposited in his children and so on. Life is a continuous uninterrupted chain. You are alive now because you came from a living cell from your father. Your father was given life through a living cell from his father and so on until we reach Adam (peace be upon him). Hence, you carry within you particles that lived since Adam. If you are blessed with children, they will have a part of you and a part of Adam and this chain of will continue until the day of resurrection. This brings us back to the verse: when Allah ordered the angels to bow before Adam, they actually bowed before Adam and all his progeny until the day of resurrection.

The phrase '**I am putting a successor on earth**' does not mean that Allah is consulting the angles about this matter, rather, He is only informing them. God informed the angels because they will have a role to play..........a link and a task related to mankind. For example, there are the angels who are the noble guardians and others who record our deeds and so on. Thus, God gave them this notification to prepare for their new tasks related to God's trustee on earth.

Here you may naturally ask, who will this successor succeed? Are people succeeding one another? Meaning that every person will die and another person will replace him or her? Or are we successors of another kind or species of creation? Let's look for the answer in the Quran. God says:

But they were succeeded by an evil generations who neglected the prayer, and followed appetites. So they will soon encounter perversity (19:59)

The verse clarifies that humans will succeed and inherit each other until the day of resurrection. However, the true meaning of succession on earth is not that of heredity, rather it is the meaning of responsibility, authority, and care for others. Adam (peace be upon him) and his progeny are appointed as God's trustees and ambassadors on earth. Allah gave Adam all that is necessary to carry out his mission on earth. He subjected the universe for mankind, made the angels prostrate before us, and provided us the means, both material and moral, to support the mission. God says in a sacred narration: *"O son of Adam, free yourself for my worship, and I will, in turn, enrich your heart with satisfaction and spare you poverty; but if you don't, then I will fill your hands with distraction and will not remove your needs and poverty."*

*Let's look at what the angels said in response to Adam's appointment; They asked "***How can You put someone there who will cause corruption and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?**" The first question to ask here is: How did the angels know that? There must have been a similar situation that occurred in the past -a situation they had compared and contrasted this case to- and assumed that Adam will transgress on land. The angles must have witnessed prior bloodshed and corruption. We find the answer in the following verse:

The jinn We created before, from the fire of scorching wind (15:27)

So, the angles made their assumptions based on the Jinn who were created before humans. When God answered with: '**I know things you do not.**' He indicated that the knowledge of the angles is limited by what they have observed before. God's knowledge, on the other hand, is comprehensive and eternal.

Whether the angels had made that statement questioning Adam's mission out loud or within themselves, Allah had knowledge of it. He knows the secret and that which more hidden than it; He knows what you share with others and what you keep to yourself.

Let's focus now on the phrase: ‘**when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness.**’ To praise means to negate all flaws that do not fit the Being, while to proclaim holiness means to cleanse to the point of absolute purity. Allah is indeed free of all flaws and has absolute holiness. This type of praise befits Allah alone, and is expressed with the Arabic word 'Subhanak' سبحانك. Only the absolute perfect being who is not tainted by any defects is praised with this word, therefore, the Arabic word 'Subhanak' is reserved exclusively for Allah's praise.

The statement of the angels: ‘we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness’ is similar to our statement when we say 'all glory is to God and all praise is belongs to Him'. His Being is not similar to any other being, neither are His attributes or actions. In fact, your ability to glorify and praise God, and your ability to say the words 'My Lord, Subhanak' in by itself is a blessing. Therefore, I praise you Allah for giving me the ability to praise and exalt you. Subhanak my Lord, only the pure is worthy of being linked to you. And it does not befit whom you created with your hands to do any

action which is not pure.

Verse 31

And He taught Adam the Names, all of them; then presented them to the angels and said, ‘Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.’ (Chapter 2: Verse 31)

God informed the angles that He is appointing human beings as successors on earth. He also informed them that they did not have sufficient knowledge to understand the wisdom behind this appointment.

The verse ended with the phrase **'I know what you do not.'** God, however, did not wish to leave this statement without supporting evidence. In this verse, Allah provides the evidence and demonstrates the angles' lack of knowledge to them.

Let's start with the word '**all**'. 'All' implies comprehensiveness and means the full knowledge of the names being taught. Here you may ask: Does that mean that God taught Adam the names of all the things that will exist from the time of creation until the last day? What about the inventions that will appear centuries after Adam? To answer this question we should note that Allah taught Adam the names in order to distinguish him above the angels. In essence, Godgranted the inferior element (in this case Adam) privileges over the angles -creatures made from a superior element-. Adam was created from clay, while the angels from light. God grants such privileges in order to remind each one of us that whatever we have is not the result of our powers and will; rather it is through God's power and will. To further understand this: suppose that a weak person needs to carry a heavy load but is unable to. A stronger person comes to help, but he cannot give the weak person part of his strength and ability; all he can do is carry that heavy load for him. Only God can grant strength to this weak person and give him the ability to carry the heavy load. Another example comes to us fromthe story of the prophet king Solomon (peace be upon). God had blessed Solomon with a kingdom the likes of which will never be until the end of time. His vast rule distinguished him above men, jinn and animals alike. Then we come across this verse where a hoopoe is giving Solomon new information:

'I have learned something you did not know: I come to you from Sheba with firm news.' (27:22)

How can the hoopoe -a feeble bird limited in intelligence- know something significant that Solomon - a king and a prophet who ruled men and jinn- did not? This is because God wants to humble His creation and remove any hint of arrogance from their hearts. For this reason, He grants inferior creations a quality that distinguishes them above superior one. These humbling acts should remind you that all your abilities are not inherent, and are not the result of your will and effort; they are from God. Likewise, we see Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) approaching al-khidr, a righteous worshipper, to learn from him that which he does not know.

This brings us back to the verse. God, the creator and the all knowing, taught the angels the names of objects from the mouth of Adam. Here we should pause and take note of a very important point. God distinguished

Adam and raised him above the angles through the gift of knowledge and learning. This is something that we can all do to raise and distinguish ourselves in life. God says:

What of him who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating and standing up, mindful of the Next World, hoping for the mercy of his Lord? Say: 'Are they the same – those who know and those who do not know?' It is only people of intelligence who pay heed. (39:9)

Some people wonder about the way Allah taught Adam these names. Keep in mind that the teaching of the Creator differs from the methods of teaching of the creation. The Creator educates through inspiration, through casting the entire knowledge of the names of the objects in the universe into the heart and mind of Adam. This includes all the objects that were to be invented and those yet to be named later. In fact, a name of a new invention is usually derived from existing language by combing and evolving the names of the surrounding objects. This is further proved by the fact that the angels, who were aware of the universe and the names of what existed in it at the time, did not know the names of the objects presented to them.

Let's take a break here to shed light on an important concept. Speech is the a product of hearing, while language is the product of the environment. Adam could not have properly spoke the names unless he had heard them from God. If you, for instance, bring a child from an Arabian country to live in London, he or she will start conversing in English fluently while not knowing a single word of Arabic. Thus, language cannot be inherited, it is the result of mimicry and imitation of what we hear. When a person is born deaf, he or she cannot hear words, so this person cannot mimic sound and ends up being mute. Thus, if Adam was able to say the names of the objects then he certainly would have learned and heard them from God.

It is also worth noting that the method God employed in educating Adam is the same method we still use to this day. We teach our children nouns and names of objects first rather than verbs and actions. For instance, you may teach your child by saying: this is a cup, this is a tree, this is a cat and so on. Once the child masters the basic nouns, you then move on to teaching him or her verbs. Thus, we learn that the initial emergence of language and speech came through God's power that taught Adam the names.

In fact, everything that exists owes its origin to Allah. The first man and woman were created by God. The emergence of knowledge required the

first teacher: Allah the all knowing. Afterwards, Adam taught the names to his children and his children passed them on to their progenies and so on. Language also diversified from God. When people spread on earth, they formed groups that evolved their own language. Every existing language nowadays branched from a common source. French, English and Italian for instance are influenced by Latin. Likewise, the vast dialects spoken in Arab countries today all revert to the proper Arabic: the language of the Quran. All these languages originated from what God taught Adam.

Now we come to the end of the verse. God says: "**if you are truthful**". The first question that comes to mind is: Do the angels lie? Angels are created from light, they praise God and do what they are commanded carrying out their mission faithfully without the slightest deviation. God is not questioning the angles' honesty, rather He is asking whether they had enough information to reach the conclusion that they did. In essence, the question is: Are you making this statement based on solid information, or are you just making predictions about what will happen in the future?

We now that he angels deduced their judgment by reflecting upon another creation that inhabited the earth -like the jinn for example- who were created before humans. Well if this is the case, then God Almighty says to them in reply that you are mistaken in your judgement. Moreover, even if you were truthful in what you have concluded of the unseen, you have no right to make that statement based on prediction. No one has the knowledge of the unseen except Allah.

This verse does not intend to criticize the angels, rather this statement works to rectify and guide them. It explains to us that the angels do not know the unseen, and that this knowledge is exclusive to God. The angles made this prediction and said what they said out of their intense love for Allah, and out of the utmost care not to see corruption or bloodshed in His universe.

Verse 32

They said, 'May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise.' (Chapter 2: Verse 32)

If every field of knowledge requires a teacher, then the first teacher has to be God. This vast knowledge that we have today is the result of the intellect that God granted man, and the result of the materials He placed at our disposal. Indeed Allah is the first teacher in the universe, and from His teachings and gifts all inventions and innovations emerged. For instance, the existence of water and the energy of the sun is primordial. Man utilized heat and fire for water evaporation and used steam as energy. This scientific leap brought on what is known as the steam age -civilizations powered by new machines and trains-. This progress came forth from pre-existing elements, and through the growth of knowledge; above all, it came through the mental competence and intelligence granted by God to man. Another example is the invention of the wheel. It most probably came from observing a fallen tree log while it rolled down a hill. In fact, scientific progress is based on previous knowledge and astute observation. For this reason, Islam came to draw our attention towards the Creator of the universe, and to re-introduce and encourage the observational and experimental science. Allah asks each one of us to reflect on His signs and to use our intellect and perception. He says:

How many a sign there is in the heavens and the earth which most men pass by and ignore (12:105)

Throughout the Quran, Allah directs you towards His signs in the heaven and on earth so that you may work your mind in advancing the human race. You and I are encouraged to continue and build upon the knowledge which God taught Adam. History is full of examples of disbelievers who excelled in science and innovation. Sir Isaac Newton, for instance, discovered gravitational force through the observation and the contemplation of objects falling and hitting the ground. He was able to formulate the theory of gravity. It should be incumbent upon us as Muslims to observe and contemplate God's signs that He placed all around us.

Take the example of the seed of a date. It contains within its core the complete map for a palm tree. Whenever the seed is sowed into proper ground, a palm tree grows and comes into existence. God has put this knowledge before us to observe and mull over. It should lead the thoughtful mind to formulate theories and carry experiments. The first theory leads to a second, and then to a third and so on. Keep in mind that the very beginnings of these sciences did not start with a theory, rather it came from what is known as axioms -that which self-evident and does not require proof-. Axioms are the things God created in the universe and upon them we build. Thus, every discovery and invention made by man originated from Allah, just as every cell, branch and fruit of a palm tree originated from its seed. Shawqi -a famous modern poet- said:

All praise to You, You encompass all, the Best Teacher...
...You taught with the pen the earliest creature

You sent Moses along with Torah as a guide...

…and the son of the virgin you taught the Gospel

And Muhammad -a spring of eloquence you caused to flow-

…and brought the Quran and Hadith for all to know

Shawqi, the poet, attributed all knowledge to God alone. Likewise, the statement of the angels: ‘**May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise’** attributes all knowledge and wisdom to God. The phrase 'All Knowing' means the one who has perfect and comprehensive knowledge of everything whether it is hidden or declared. ‘Wisdom’ on the other hand, refers to the ability to use this knowledge properly and assign it where it truly belongs. In the Arabic language, the word ' كمة□ 'wisdom' originated from the word 'bridle'. It is the piece of leather and iron that is placed on a horse’s mouth so the rider can take control and aim the animal towards the desired destination. Without it, the animal would wonder aimlessly and may take the rider wayward. Similarly, wisdom sets a proper goal for each action thus producing harmony and progress. It is with wisdom that the universe becomes a place governed with justice. Allah, the all Wise, is the one who identifies for each creation its bounds, and places each entity within its proper framework. Lets clarify this point with an example, wisdom in medical treatment calls putting the doctor's knowledge to use for proper diagnosis of the disease and proper prescription of the medication that will treat it. Without wisdom, the Doctor's knowledge has no value, and may even cause more harm to the

patient. Wisdom in interior car design lies in proper ergonomics; labelling each button and placing it within easy reach of the driver.

Keep in mind that God's attribute ‘The all-Wise’ also requires being 'All-Knowing.' because this comprehensive knowledge is what allows for perfecting everything as wisdom entails. God granted each of His creations the proper knowledge and instinct according to its need and mission in life. It is not from the nature of angels, for example, nor it is required for their mission in the universe, to know what man will do on earth in the future. Allah distinguished man by blessing him with intellect to discover the signs of God in the universe according to the needs and advancement of life. All this is perfectly summarized in the following verses:

Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High: Who creates and fashions in due proportions, And Who determines and guides (87:1-3)

Therefore, everything is created with a destiny and the path, and each is guided and provided with whatever is needed to facilitate this journey.

Verse 33

Then He said, ‘Adam, tell them the names of these.’ When he told them their names, God said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal?’ (Chapter 2: Verse 33)

When God created and appointed Adam as a successor and a trustee on earth, the angels remarked '**'How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?'**. In the this verse, God is presenting evidence to the angles that their knowledge is incomplete, and that the wisdom behind Adam's creation escapes them.

Even before the creation of Adam, God had full knowledge of what Adam and his descendants will do until the last day and beyond. The angels, on the other hand, did not possess this knowledge because it is not related to their task. Recall what we discussed earlier: each person is guided by Allah and is given access to the proper knowledge that facilitates whatever he or she is created for. Thus, in this instance, Allah wanted to clarify to the angels when they pre-judged Adam -as a result of their experience observing other creations that preceded him- they formulated a false perception about the future.

In order to present this proof to the angles, God distinguished Adam, before all the angels to see, by teaching him the names of everything. God, then, asked the angels to tell Him these names -a fairly simple task-. They replied that the all knowledge belongs to God alone, and as long as He does not teach them the names, they will not be able to know them. At that moment, Allah ordered Adam to inform the angels about the names of these things. Adam had the information not through his effort or experience, rather, it was through the knowledge taught to him by Allah. It is God who is all knowledgeable as the following verse illustrates:

He began with their sacks before his brother's sack; and then he brought the drinking-cup out of his brother's sack. In this way We made an arrangement for Joseph. Under the king's law, he could not have detained his brother, had not God so willed. Whomsoever We will, We raise in ranks. Above every owner of knowledge there is one more knowledgeable (12:76)

Hence, it was through God's will that Adam obtained the knowledge of what the angels did not have at that moment. Here, and by teaching Adam, God replied to the concern of the angels that 'Adam will cause corruption on land'. He said '**Did I not tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and the earth**'.

Let's examine the word '**hidden**' which refers to the knowledge of the unseen. The unseen or the unknown is of two types: the relative and the absolute. Suppose, for example, that my wallet was stolen, and I was unable to find or know the person who stole it. Thus, this knowledge is hidden from me or unseen. At the same time, however, this knowledge is known to the one who committed the theft, and to anyone who assisted with or witnessed the crime. This type of the unseen, or the unknown, is relative. Another example is a corporate board's decision to promote some employees and discharge others. As long as the decision is not publicised, it remains a relative unseen -known to some and not known to others-. This is not the type of knowledge referred to in this verse. The verse refers to the absolute unseen. The sort of knowledge that is absent from all; the knowledge that is not preceded by any signs or clues and often comes as a total surprise. None beside God has this type of knowledge.

The last part of this verse: '**and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal'** sparks another question in our minds. Did the angels say: '**how can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness**' out aloud or did they keep it in to themselves? God's statement: '**and what you conceal'** suggests that the angels might have said what they said within themselves. Whatever the case may be, whether they declared it or concealed it, God knew it because His knowledge is absolute and encompasses everything. When it comes to Allah's knowledge: both the declared and the concealed, the past and the future are all equal.

Verse 34

And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam,' they prostrated, but not Iblis: he refused and

acted arrogantly, and he was one of the faithless. (Chapter 2: Verse 34)

God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam. This issue has caused controversy, and stirred many debates. Some people argued: how can the angels bow before an entity other than God? Isn't prostration is only performed before Allah? Others said: Does the prostration of the angels before Adam suggest that they worshiped him?

In order to answer these arguments, let's look into the true meaning of the verse. God elevated Adam above the angels by teaching him the names, then He asked them to bow down before Adam. The first important point that must be understood is that prostration before Adam reflected the angel's obedience to God. It was not meant as an act of worship to Adam. Allah was the one who ordered them to prostrate, not Adam. Thus, when the command was issued by God, whoever obeyed this command fell into the category of a worshipper of God, and whoever rejected this command was from amongst the disobedient to God.

The second point to understand is the true meaning or worship. By definition, worship means to obey God’s commands and avoid His prohibitions. Hence, when God says: ‘do’ then I must do, and when He says: ‘do not do’ then I must not do. My obedience to my creator, in both His commands and His prohibitions, is the very essence of worship. I do not pick and choose which command to obey or reject. Take for example the pilgrimage trip to Mecca. During Hajj you strive to kiss the black stone placed at the corner of the Ka’ba, while you throw pebbles at the stones that represent the devils in Mina. You kiss one stone, and throw pebbles at another! This signifies the true meaning of worshipping God and following His commands. We do as Allah has ordered; we hold nothing sacred except for His command and doctrine. Thus, we elevate the status of one stone because God ordered so, and debase another stone because God ordered so.

This brings us back to the verse. The angels did not prostrate before Adam out of worship or respect for Adam, rather they bowed before him by the command of God. There is a great difference between prostrating to something out of worship, and prostrating to the same thing because God has commanded so. Allah's order to the angels to prostrate to Adam is similar to His command to us to prostrate towards Mecca and the

Ka'aba. We do not bow to the Ka'aba itself, rather we prostrate to the authority of God. Thus, when the angles prostrated before Adam, they did not go beyond the boundaries of faith in God. In fact, their act was absolute obedience to Allah; and obedience is the foundation of faith.

Here is another question that often comes up: Did all of the angels bow down? The answer is No. Only those angels who were appointed to perform tasks related to Adam did. God Almighty sheds lights on their appointments in the following verses:

Surely there are guardians over you, Illustrious scribes, Who know what you do. (82:10-12)

And in another verse:

He does not utter a single word, without a watcher by him, pen in hand! (50:18)

and lastly:

And those who regulate affairs. (79:5)

From the verses above you can appreciate that angels are assigned different tasks. Some are given the job of recording our deeds, thoughts and words. Others are appointed to guard and protect us and so on. All the angels that have tasks related to humans were included in the command to prostrate before Adam. Prostration, on the other hand, did not include the angels elevated in ranks such as the carriers of the throne, the guardians of the heavens and so on. That is why when Satan (Iblis) refused to prostrate, God Almighty asked:

He said, 'Iblis, what prevented you prostrating to what I created with My own Hands? Were you overcome by arrogance or are you amongst the exalted?' (38:75)

This phrase **'Or are you one of the exalted?'** questions Iblis if he thought of himself amongst the angels elevated in rank who were not commanded to prostrate.

When Allah issued his command, all angels who were included in the order prostrated, except for Iblis who refused and disobeyed God. Some people argue that, since the command was issued to the angels, Iblis was excluded. Satan, after all, is not an angel; he is from amongst the jinn as the following verse illustrates:

When We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam,' they

prostrated, but not Iblis. He was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command. Will you then take him and his offspring for guardians in My stead, though they are your enemies? How evil a substitute for the wrongdoers! (18:50)

The Jinn, like humans, are given freedom of choice. So being from the jinn was the very reason why Iblis transgressed against God's command. Had he been from amongst the angels –who are impelled to obey – he would have carried God's command faithfully. Satan entered into sin through the door of free choice - a privilege that both humans and jinn enjoy-. If God wanted to compel Iblis to prostrate, he would never have been able to disobey. Allah gave us this information so we can learn and pay attention to how sin may creep into the heart.

As to those who claim that Satan, as a jinn, was not included in God's command to prostrate before Adam, we answer with the following verse:

God said, 'What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?' and he said, 'I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay.' (7:12)

Satan's sin was grave. Not only did he refuse to obey a direct command from God, but he also rejected God and questioned his wisdom as the following verse illustrates:

When We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed down, but not Iblis. He retorted, 'Why should I bow down to someone You have created out of clay?' (17:61)

Let's take a moment to look into Satan's background. Although he was from the jinn -a creation ranked lower than the angles- he used to be in the Angels' company. He was known as the 'peacock of the angels.' He reached this honor because of his worship and devotion. Iblis prided himself with this achievement, and it was pride that dragged him into sin. Initially, he used his freedom of choice by carrying himself towards perfecting God's worship and obedience -not a small feat-. However, self-pride in this achievement transformed Satan's humbleness into arrogance, arrogance into sin, and sin into defiance and disbelief. As soon as the command to prostrate to Adam was issued, Satan's pride kicked in and he immediately declined out of vanity. He lost sight of faith and could no longer bring himself to obey God's order. Thus, Satan's sin was the worst sin that one can commit. It did not come from weakness, or distraction from God's orders. It came from defiance and arrogance. Hence, God expelled him from His mercy and made him the accursed. When Iblis realized that he no longer had access to mercy, he

asked God to respite him until the last day. He swore by God's honor to tempt and deceive the children of Adam as the following verse demonstrates:

I will come at them- from their front and their back, from their right and their left- and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.' (7:17)

In the verse above, you may notice that Satan mentioned four direction from which he will approach humans. However, as you well know, there are six directions: right, left, front, back, above and below. The two directions that Satan omitted were: from above and from below. This gives you a very important piece of information: The devil cannot approach you from above and from below'. 'Below' signifies the place where you prostrate in submission to God. While 'above' is the place of ascension of your prayers and supplications. When you are truly connected with Allah through prayer, supplication, and good deeds, then the devil has no access to you. God says:

you will have no power over My servants, only over the ones who go astray and follow you.(15:42)

Verse 35

And We said to Adam: "Both you and your spouse live in the Garden, eat freely to your fill wherever you like, but do not go near this tree, or you will become transgressors. (Chapter 2: Verse 35)

Allah intended to give Adam the opportunity to practice his task and get ready for his mission on earth. He exposed Adam and his wife to a practical experience similar to what they will face in life. This experience included following God's path and being exposed to distractions and the whispers of Satan. It is truly through the mercy of Allah that He did not want Adam to begin his mission on earth solely based on theoretical arguments. There is a big difference, after all, between theory and practice, between talking the talk, and walking the walk. You may agree to a statement in the theoretical sense, for example, but when the time to act comes, you may change your mind. Think about the many times you decided to exercise at the gym, or to read a novel, yet, when the time came for action, your attitude and commitment changed.

Thus, the period Adam lived in paradise was for the sake of the practical application of God’s worship. It was meant to better prepare Adam and Eve to begin their task on earth. This practical exercise exposed them to the experience of having to follow the ‘dos’ and ‘do nots’, the lawful, and the unlawful; all while having to deal with the deviation and whispers of Satan. Perhaps more importantly, a very valuable benefit of this exercise was learning how to repent and return to God. Always remember this point: Allah does not abandon the disobedient, rather He opens wide the doors of repentance for him or her.

You have probably heard the following argument from many people around you: If only Adam did not disobey God, then we would all be in paradise today. We answer with a simple: No! Paradise in the hereafter is specifically for the hereafter, and man will not reside in it temporarily, nor is there any chance to be expelled from it. It is, as God informed us, eternal and everlasting. Whoever enters it he will live in perpetual bliss.

The paradise gardens referred to in this verse, where Adam and Eve resided, are different. They lived in a paradise that was meant for the experience of learning and applying God's curriculum. If you take time to recite the Noble Quran, you will find that God generalized the word paradise and used to describe gardens of this world and the next. The Arabic word for paradise ‘jannah’ is derived from the verb ‘jann’ which means to hide or to conceal something. It refers to dense trees and foliage that hide those who live in them so others cannot see them. It means that the fruits it bears are more than sufficient so the inhabitants never need to leave it for sustenance. Let's look at a few examples from the Quran. God says:

Indeed we have tested them just as We tested the People of the Garden when they vowed they would gather its fruit at dawn, and they added not the saving words (68:17-18)

This verse tells the story of the brothers who owned a huge productive orchard (referred to as Jannah), yet they deprived the poor, needy and orphans from their rights. Thus, God destroyed the fruits of the garden and burned its tress. Here is another example:

Tell them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; (18:32)

This is a narration of a man whom God had blessed with two gardens, but rather than having gratitude for this blessing, he disbelieved and rejected resurrection and accountability in the hereafter. And lastly, these verses:

There was a sign for the people of Sheba, too, in their dwelling place: two gardens, one on the right, one on the left: 'Eat from what your Lord has provided for you and give Him thanks, for your land is good, and your Lord most forgiving.' But they paid no heed, so We let loose on them a ?ood from the dam and replaced their two gardens with others that yielded bitter fruit, tamarisk bushes, and a few lote trees. In this way We punished them for their ingratitude- would We punish anyone but the ungrateful? (34:15-17)

In all the previous verses, we see that Allah used the Arabic word 'jannah' 'paradise' for gardens in this world, and did not limit the word to the heaven of the hereafter. Thus, we conclude that it was not the promised eternal paradise in which Adam and Eve lived, rather, it was the paradise of preparation, the paradise of practicing the application of God's laws before descending to earth.

This also answers the allegation that Iblis (Satan) was able to enter paradise even after he disobeyed and disbelieved in God. Here again, Satan did not enter the eternal paradise of the hereafter. So now, when you hear someone claim that Adam's sin is what threw us out of paradise, you have the information to disprove this false claim. Moreover, remember that Allah identified Adam's mission before creating him. He says:

when your Lord told the angels, 'I am putting a successor on earth,' (2:30)

So Adam was created for the specific task of being God's successor on earth in this life. In the hereafter, whoever is righteous from his descendants will enter the ever-lasting paradise and live in eternal pleasure.

God Almighty continued: **‘eat freely to your fill wherever you like’.** In paradise, God provided Adam and Eve with everything that guarantees life and pleasure. Likewise, He created all that is required to support life on earth before Adam's life began. All these blessings are form God's grants of Lordship. He is the One who created, brought you and I into existence, and He is the one who guarantees that all His creations' needs are met. Grants such as water, oxygen, food and countless others are provided regardless of one's faith or actions.

Let's take a moment to examine the word 'live.' God said: **" Both you and your spouse live in the Garden.”** The word 'live' is translated from the Arabic origin 'uskun.' In Arabic ‘as-sakan’ refers to the place where one finds comfort, a place to which he longs to return after a long trip. You may travel for some time, but regardless of the luxury of the hotels, there is nothing like the comfort and peace of your own home. It is the place that you are meant to be.

The command ‘**but do not go near this tree**’ completes God's curriculum that Adam and Eve were asked to adhere to. God’s religion revolves around commands and prohibitions. All heavenly scriptures, and all God’s curriculums on earth revolve around 'dos' and 'do nots.' In the verse under discussion: **‘Both you and your spouse live in the Garden’** is a command, **‘eat freely to your fill,’** is also a command, while **‘do not go near this tree’** is a prohibition. These were the first laws set to teach man God's obedience.

If you look at the commands above, you will note that Allah granted Adam countless things and prohibited one single item. This model applies to our faith today. The prohibitions are few and far between, while the permissible are abundant. In fact this applies to all the heavenly messages on earth. Allah has showered you with countless bounties, while making a very small number of actions prohibited.

Let's examine the first phrase of this verse. God says: ‘**We said to Adam**.’ Why did Allah address Adam with the plural pronoun ‘We’ while God is only one? The verse should logically have said: 'I said to Adam.' The pronoun 'we' in this verse is used to indicate grandeur and

majesty, not plurality. Thus, when any event is being attributed to God the pronoun ‘we’ is used to denote magnificence and majesty, because every act requires many attributes for its completion and perfection. For example, when you intend to do something such as driving a car, it requires your physical effort to turn the wheel, your knowledge to operate the car, wisdom to navigate traffic and so on. Hence, there are many factors that are required to perform a single task. Likewise, when an act is attributed to Allah, it requires many of his attributes of perfection, and the pronoun 'we' is used.

On the other hand, when God refers to His oneness He says: ‘**certainly I am the God**’ and does not say ‘certainly we are the God’ because in this context God Almighty oneness is intended. Thus, when verses refer to God in worship and oneness, the singular pronoun is used. When the verses refer to events and actions relating to God, the pronoun 'We' reflecting His majesty and grandeur is used. God says:

We built the heavens with Our power and will continue to expand them (51:47)

In another example, when Allah praised prophet Abraham by saying: “**surely, Abraham was a nation'** despite the fact that the word nation (ummah in Arabic) is only used for a large group of people. However, God wanted to shows us that the person of Abraham embodies the excellent attributes of an entire community. He possessed qualities that cannot be found collectively in an individual, but require a nation. A person in a nation may be known as truthful, another maybe supremely brave, while another may have great wisdom or be a great leader and so on. But prophet Abraham had such a great character; that he embodied all the virtuous qualities of an entire nation.

Let's continue with the verse. God says ' **Both you and your spouse live in the Garden**‘ For the word 'Live', Allah used for the Arabic word ‘uskun.’ In order to use this word, two factors must be satisfied: peace and tranquillity. ‘Uskun’ refers to the abundance of peace and tranquillity, and derived from it is the word ‘sakan’ which means 'home'. If the place where you live lacks peace and tranquillity, then it is simply referred to as a house or a dwelling, not a home. The same Arabic word 'sakan' is also used for wife. God says:

Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who re? ect. (30:21)

The elements: peace, compassion and love are all available in a righteous spouse, thus the word 'tuskun' is used. And in another verse:

Accept the offerings they make from their wealth in order to cleanse and purify them for progress, and invoke blessings upon them. Your blessings will surely bring them peace, for God hears all and knows everything. (9:103)

Here again, the word 'sakan' is used to describe the prophets prayers and supplication for his companions.

Another point to note is that God's commands and rewards are equal towards the male and female alike. God said: '**both you and your spouse live in the Garden.'**

and in another verse:

Whoever does evil will be repaid with its equivalent; whoever does good and believes, be it a man or a woman, will enter Paradise and be provided for without measure. (40:40)

When it comes to faith, Men and women are equal as far as their relationship with God is concerned.

Now let's talk about the paradise where Adam and Eve lived. God says:

In the garden you will never go hungry, feel naked, be thirsty, or suffer the heat of the sun.' (20:118-119)

These were the elements that God provided Adam and his wife in paradise as they were preparing for their mission on earth. As we discussed earlier, this was not the promised paradise of the hereafter, rather it was a place to apply God's curriculum. The garden was abundant in its gifts and bounties. Thus, when God told Adam and Eve to eat whatever they wished to their fill, it indicated that the place was blessed in quantity and variety.

Then came the single prohibition: '**Do not go near this tree**' in other words: do not even go near it. The natural question to ask is: Why didn't God simply say 'do not eat from this tree?' Eating from the tree, after all, was the true sin, not going near it. The answer lies in God's infinite mercy and knowledge of His creation. Not only did Allah want to keep Adam and his spouse away from sin, but He also wanted to protect them from the lure of sin. If God had said: 'do not eat from this tree,' then going close to it would have been permissible, and could have easily resulted in being pulled-in by its beauty, its color, or sweet aroma. Under

those circumstances, temptation is a much harder force to fight, and the possibility of falling into sin becomes much greater.

Allah is most aware of His creation; He knows that when something is made unlawful, your soul becomes curious about it. And as long as you do not hover around it, it is easy for you to move on and not fall into sin. Take for example when God prohibited the drinking of alcohol. God did not say ‘prohibited for you is alcohol’ Instead He said:

O you who believe! Intoxicants, games of chance, sacrifices to idols, and divination by arrows are a loathsome evil of Satan’s doing; so turn wholly away from it so that you may prosper (5:90)

Allah wants you to avoid gatherings where alcohol is consumed and avoid places where it is traded. In short, He wants you to stay away from all paths that may lead towards the temptation of drinking alcohol. This Quranic verse commands you to completely distance yourself from alcohol. Allah wants to protect you even from the possibility of lure towards sin. Therefore, we see God using phrases such as ‘do not approach,’ ‘avoid,’ ‘do not hover about' unlawful matters. As the wise often say: 'out of sight, out of mind.'

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"Verily, what is permissible is clear, and what is prohibited is clear, but between them there are dubious matters which many people do not know. So, whoever stays away from these uncertain matters has protected his faith and his family, and whoever falls into these matters, falls into sin. It is like the shepherd who grazes his herd near guarded grounds: he greatly risks accidentally grazing inside them. Indeed! Every king possesses guarded grounds. God's guarded grounds are His prohibitions”.

Some, who are ignorant about their faith, drink alcohol and claim that the Quran does not clearly prohibit it. The verse does not contain the words ‘alcohol is prohibited,’ it does not say 'do not drink alcohol.' We answer that the words used in the Quran such as ‘avoid' and 'stay away from' and 'do not come near' are much more emphatic in prohibiting alcohol. Such phrases warn against being in the vicinity of Alcohol, against even letting your eyes gaze or look at it.

There has been some disagreement regarding the type of tree that was forbidden in paradise. Was it an apple tree, a fig tree, or something else? This type of detail holds no significance because the true objective is that it was banned; what God has made lawful and what He made unlawful.

The verse ends with the phrase ‘**Or you will become transgressors’**. Transgression is a term that encompasses oppression, and exploitation by depriving others of their rights. An unjust person takes more than what he or she has earned. Whoever violates a right of another –whether physical or emotional – has certainly transgressed. Keep in mind that a person at times may do injustice against him or herself. God says:

those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their bad actions -and who can forgive bad actions except Allah?- and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing. (3:135)

How can you do injustice to yourself? You may treat others unfairly, but when it comes to yourself, you usually look out for your best interest...right? Keep in mind that when you try to fulfil every whim and desire that you have, when you run after the immediate lust in the world, you are in fact, depriving yourself from the eternal pleasure of the hereafter. Isn't it unjust to earn the eternal torment of the hereafter in exchange for the fleeting pleasure of life? Even worse, there are some who exchange their faith and integrity for the benefit of someone else. Take for example a person who gives false testimony in a murder case in order to please or protect his or her guilty boss. At the end of the day, this person does not earn any benefit, rather he or she has committed great self-injustice for the benefit of someone else. In the verse ‘**or you will become transgressor**’ God is referring to those who wrong themselves, and rob themselves from great long lasting benefit in exchange for temporary gain.

Verse 36

But Satan made them slip, expelling them from the state they were in. We said, ‘Go down from here as enemies to

each other! You will have residence on the earth and enjoyment for a time.’ (Chapter 2: Verse 36)

Allah gave Adam and his wife residence in paradise, and informed them of what is lawful and what is not. After which, Satan began his dreadful mission of hostility and enmity towards Adam and his descendants. He eventually succeeded in causing them to slip into a mistake. How could this have happened while God had previously warned them not to follow Satan? How could this have happened while God had declared Satan as their enemy? God says:

so We said, ‘Adam, this is your enemy, yours and your wife’s: do not let him drive you out of the garden and make you miserable. (20:117)

This verse emphasises that the enmity had already existed and was clearly declared. Let’s assume for a moment, however, that it was not declared. Even if that was the case, didn't Adam witness the incident where Satan disobeyed God’s order and did not bow before him? Wasn't Adam aware of how arrogant Satan was when he declared ‘I am better than him’? All of these instances should have served as warnings to Adam that Satan will never intend any good for him. On top of all that, God had clearly warned Adam and his wife about Satan.

The verse continues: ' **expelling them from the state they were in**'. Here you may ask: From which state and conditions were they expelled? It was from the state of luxury, peace, tranquillity and endless bounties that came to them without fatigue or effort. God had warned them in another verse ‘**do not let him drive you out of the garden and make you miserable**’. It is perhaps worth noting that, up to this point, the warnings and the conversations Allah addressed Adam and Eve with were all in the plural form, encompassing both Adam and Eve. However, when it came to the phrase **'make you miserable’**, it was addressed only to Adam in the singular form. Why wasn't it addressed to Adam and Eve like the rest of the verses? This verse is actually meant to draw our attention to the unique and natural tasks of the husband and wife in this world. The woman’s task is to be a source of comfort for the man, relieving him from his fatigue and troubles when he gets home. The man, on the other hand, is responsible for providing food and shelter for his

family. In paradise, food and shelter were readily available without any work. On earth, Adam had to put in hard work to provide adding misery to his day.

Nowadays, we see this natural system being changed. Women are being asked, and are expected to earn a living just like the man. This only adds to the stress of the household. How can the woman provide peace, tranquillity, and stability to the family when she is under the same stress as the man? In most instances, when the woman has a full time job, it happens at the expense of her children and husband. This misarrangement affects the society as a whole as the children lack stability, and may get lost. The husband and wife start to fight and may seek to fulfil the need for comfort and peace somewhere else. When the family unit suffers, so does the entire society.

Adam should have realized that Satan blamed him for being banished from God's mercy. He should have been vigilant, and should not have listened to Satan, or accepted his advice. How did Satan cause Adam and his wife to commit this mistake? We find the answer in the following verse:

Satan whispered to them so as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them: he said, 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals,' (7:20)

Satan started by lying and claiming that whoever eats from this tree will become a angel and be immortal. Satan's whispers are always wrapped in lies in order to dress up and beautify sin. Keep in mind that Satan does not care whichever sin you commit. He only wants you to be a sinner. If he finds that he cannot get you to lie, he will try to lure you into adultery or into not paying almsgiving (zakat). As long as you sin -any sin- he would have achieved his goal. This is in sharp contrast to the whisper of one's sinful self. Your own self has a specific desire that strives to be fulfilled. It entices you towards a specific sin, and insists on coming back to that sin. You may have weakness for the opposite sex, or for money, or for acting arrogantly. If you find yourself coming back to the same sin over and over, then know that it is not from Satan, rather it is from your own self.

Let's look at how Satan approached Adam. He started by saying '***Shall* I guide *you* to the tree of immortality and a *kingdom* which decays not?**' But when this effort did not succeed, he came from another angle by saying: '***Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save you should become angels*** **or become of the immortals**', and then again by

appealing to their faith, **'and he swore to them, 'I am giving you sincere advice'-**. Adam missed the point that if Satan was honest about the tree, he would have eaten from it and became immortal rather than asking God to respite him until the last day. In fact, carelessness and forgetfulness is what led Adam to fall into sin. God says:

Assuredly We had made a covenant with Adam, but he acted forgetfully. We did not find resolve in him (20:115)

Is forgetfulness a sin? you may ask. We find the answer in the following verse:

and they both ate from it. They became conscious of their nakedness and began to cover themselves with leaves from the garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray- (20:121)

Yes, forgetfulness was a sin in former nations. However, it was from the mercy of Allah and the love of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that this burden has been lifted in Islam. The Prophet said: "Forgiven for my nation are oversight, forgetfulness and what was forced upon them"

The verse continues: ' **We said, 'Go down from here as enemies to each other! You will have residence on the earth and enjoyment for a time.'**

This was the beginning of human life on earth, and the start of our mission in the world. The phrase '**You will have residence on the earth and enjoyment for a time.'** means that life on earth is temporary.

Some people claim that Adam's mistake is a burden on all of us necessitating the need for a saviour. Someone who can lift the burden of the original sin off our shoulders. However, this argument misses a central point. There is a difference between an original sin and a mistake. Adam's committed a mistake, and his mistake was rectified and forgiven. Once a mistake is rectified, there is no longer need for punishment. Adam received words from his Lord and his repentance was accepted. When Allah's forgives, there is no trace of that sin left for anyone to carry. Moreover, Adam's mistake was eating from a forbidden tree; and if such a sin requires a saviour, how about the grave sins of rape, murder and so on? Sins are not inherited as God clarifies in the following verse:

'No one who carries a burden bears another's load; and even if the burdened soul cry out for help none will carry the least of its burden, however close a relative it may be. (35:18)

The phrase **‘enemies to each other'** refers to the animosity between man and Satan. The ongoing battle between the devils and the believers, as any battle between good and evil, should keep us vigilant. Those who are hostile towards Islam should help drive every Muslim to learn more about his or her faith in order to preserve and defend it. When you have an enemy, you always strive to surpass him by all means, and this type of competition is necessary and healthy.

Take a moment to look through history, you will find that the periods of fastest scientific advancement and innovation were the periods of war. During hostilities, each camp tries to overcome the opponent. The best scientists, engineers and thinkers are recruited and given vast resources in order to dominate over the enemy. While these advances and inventions may initially be for the purpose of destruction and killing, their benefits remain to serve humanity during peace. Great leaps in flight technology, such as the birth of the jet engine were the result of world war II. The internet and GPS satellite navigation were born out of the cold war.

The phrase **'Go Down'** means descending to a lower place from a higher one. This descent maybe physical or maybe intangible in status. You may, for example, say that a friend has fallen in your sight when he or she had betrayed your trust. In this case descent is referring to value rather than physical space. Similarly, there may be a person living hundreds of miles away from you, but he or she is closer to your heart than the person sitting right next to you. Adam and Eve descended to earth after their experience and faith-based exercise was conducted in the Garden. God has the full knowledge whether Adam's descent in this verse was physical or in status.

During Adam's stay in heaven, Allah clearly demonstrated for him that Satan is his enemy who does not intend any good for him. He also showed Adam that all Satan's promises are lies. God further pointed to all of us that the worldly life, in all its allures and enjoyments, is temporary. He said: ‘**You will have residence on earth and enjoyment for a time.’** No one will remain on earth except for the period Allah has destined for him or her to live.

Now, let's move on to the next verse. God says:

Verse 37

Then Adam received words from his Lord and He accepted his repentance: He is the All-forgiving and most merciful. (Chapter 2: Verse 37)

Prior to their descent to earth, Adam and Eve had the practical experience of applying God's laws under the constant whispers and temptations of Satan. These temptations, along with our freedom of choice are bound to result in mistakes and sin. Therefore, after Adam and Eve committed their first mistake, it was necessary for repentance and forgiveness to be legislated. An interesting point to note is that the legislation of repentance is not only out of God's mercy for the disobedient, rather it is for the benefit and mercy of the entire community. Imagine for a moment a world with no forgiveness, so when a person living in such a world disobeys God, he or she knows that there is no room for repentance. When a person loses hope, he or she will turn to a life of continual sin and crime. Transgression and injustice will be rampant in society. Who will suffer in such case? Of course, the society in which that disobedient person lives. In fact, the believers will suffer the most because they are people of good character who strive to make life kind and just. Allah is the most merciful, and He wants all of us to show mercy to one another. He says:

Those of you possessing affluence and ample wealth should not make oaths that they will not give to their relatives and the very poor and those who left their homes in the service of God. They should rather pardon and overlook. Would you not love Allah to forgive you? Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (24:22)

and in another verse:

If you divorce wives before consummating the marriage but after fixing a bride-gift for them, then give them half of what you had previously fixed, unless they waive their right, or unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives his right. Waiving your right is nearer to godliness, so do not forget to be generous towards one another: God sees what you do. (2:337)

There are many verses in the Noble Quran that encourage everyone to pardon and forgive. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "My Lord gave me nine bits of advice, and I share them with you. He advised me to be sincere whether in private or in public; to do justice whether in anger or in happiness; to be moderate whether in riches or in poverty; to reconnect with those who abandoned me; to give to those who deprived me; to forgive those who wronged me; God advised that my silence be thoughtful; my speech be mindful and my gaze be considerate”

You can see from the examples above that if repentance was not legislated, then the entire community, especially the believers, would have suffered immensely. Repentance and forgiveness are amongst Allah's greatest gifts to mankind.

Allah legislated repentance first, then, as people started asking for forgiveness, He receives each person's words. At that point, God accepts this repentance or rejects it out of His will, knowledge and wisdom. He says:

And to the three men who stayed behind: when the earth, for all its spaciousness, closed in around them, when their very souls closed in around them, when they realized that the only refuge from God was with Him, He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return to Him. God is the all forgiving, the Most Merciful. (9:118)

Allah wanted Adam to repent, so he taught him how to ask for forgiveness, and then forgave him. Some people criticize the fact that Adam was forgiven for his mistake while Satan was accursed and destined to eternity in hell for his disobedience. Isn't that unfair? We answer that this argument misses the central point of what Adam actually did. Adam ate from the forbidden tree, but as soon as he realized his mistake he stopped, did not persist or defy Allah; Rather he said ‘O Lord Your command and religion is the truth but I was unable to take control over myself, so please pardon me’. Adam confessed his sin and admitted his weakness. He acknowledged that God's path is the truth, and asked for forgiveness. In contrast, Satan rejected God's command and path. He followed his sin by saying ‘I am better than him. You created me from

fire and You created him from clay,' 'by Your Might, then I will surely mislead them all except Your chosen servants amongst them,' 'I will surely sit and wait for them on Your straight path'. Clearly, Satan did not acknowledge his sin nor regret his actions. And this clear denial of God - the gravest of sin- is what lead to his eternal removal from God's mercy.

You and I should learn from this difference between Adam's sin and that of Satan. The main lesson is: Beware of rejecting God's commands and teachings. If you do not pray, for example, then do not say that 'I do not pray because there is no benefit in prayer'. Likewise, if you miss paying your almsgiving (zakah), then do not say that the legislation of zakah is unfair or unclear. Similarly, if you do not apply God's laws, do not say that God's teachings are not compatible with modern life. Because if you say any of these statements, then, you will become a disbeliever, and you will lose access to God's mercy.

Instead, if you happen to be in a situation of weakness, or you are unable to bring yourself to carry God's teachings, then say 'My Lord the obligation of prayer, the duty of zakah, and the application of your teachings are the truth, but I am unable to bring myself to do this duty because my faith is weak. God, please shower your mercy upon me, and help me come back to your path in this life and the next'. When you sincerely say these words, you will only be considered disobedient, and you will always have access to God's mercy and forgiveness.

Scholars attempted to specify the words that Adam received from God. What were those words? We find part of the answer in following verse:

They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If you do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will be among the lost.' (7:23)

This verse gives us an insight that Adam and Eve did not commit sin out of arrogance, rather it was out of carelessness and weakness. They both expressed regret and humbleness. Each of them said: 'O Lord, Your order to abstain from the tree was the truth but I was unable to bring myself to carry it'.

The words that Adam received from God may also have been: 'O Allah, there is no deity except You, You are the exalted and to you belongs all praise, I have greatly wronged myself so grant me forgiveness. You are the forgiving One.' or 'accept my repentance, you are the Acceptor of repentance' or he may have supplicated 'exalted is God, praised is God and there is no deity except Him'. Whatever the words may have been,

the important point to remember is that God inspired Adam the words by which he can obtain forgiveness and closeness to Him.

Keep in mind that God created you as an individual who has freedom of choice. You are not compelled to follow His orders. Allah wants you to turn to Him out of love, not by force or compulsion. That is why He gave you the ability to obey and disobey. And as long as you have free will, there is always a chance that you will make the wrong decision. That does not mean that you were created to make a single choice of being either absolute good or pure evil. There are good people who fall into sin every now and then; the opposite is also true. Thus, each one of us may forget and make a mistake, or be weak and get enticed into sin. It is for this very reason that Allah legislated repentance so that you do not despair from His mercy. At every turn in your life you can ask for forgiveness and be close to your creator. As the saying goes: perhaps a sin that generates humility and regret is better than obedience that provokes pride and arrogance.

Always keep in mind that Allah is the all merciful, the all forgiving. When you repent and He grants you forgiveness it is like the sin had never happened. God accepted Adam's repentance, so when Adam descended to earth to begin his mission in life, he did bear any burden or any trace of his sin. None of us bear that sin either, Allah had forgiven Adam and Eve and He wiped their slate clean. Allah, after all, was the one who reached out to Adam to teach him the words of repentance. God's forgiveness leaves no trace of sin behind.

He says: **'He is the always forgiving, the Most Merciful'** 'always forgiving' indicates that God does not seize His servants over only a single sin. Moreover, 'always' indicates perpetual repetition. The emphasis in God's attribute 'the always forgiving' (at-Tawwab in Arabic) is apparent in two ways:

First: Allah may repeatedly accept the repentance and forgive the many sins of a single person, thus making Allah 'the always forgiving'. And second: He may accept the repentance and forgive few sins from a large number of people, al making Him 'the always forgiving'. Let's clarify this point with an example. You may describe a person as having an insatiable appetite for food when he eats a very large amount of food. This person may eat the normal number of meals a day, but he eats a very large amount at each meal. Or he this person may eat a normal quantity of food at each meal, but may have ten or more meals each day. Either way this person would be described as having an insatiable appetite for food.

Similarly, God almighty is always forgiving because the number of His creations is great. If each one committed a single sin then the number of all the sins put together will be enormous, thus mercy and forgiveness is enormous. But if someone commits sins repeatedly and Allah forgives him or her, then Allah is also the always forgiving. The emphasis in 'Al Tawab' ((التواب reflects both the number, and the perpetuity of mercy.

Once a woman came to Caliph Omar (may God be pleased with him) yelling and screaming because her son was caught red-handed stealing. She said to Omar my son has never stole before this. He replied to her: God is a far more merciful than to seize His servant the very first time he or she commits a mistake. Your son must have stolen many times before and gotten away with it.

In fact, the attribute 'Al-Tawaab' suggests that Allah may seize and punish after the second or the third or maybe the twentieth time a sin is repeated. So beware that if you persist in disobedience, God may stop you as you would be disregarding and abusing what 'Al Tawaab' means.

One of the most beautiful aspects about God's mercy and forgiveness that it is pure. Allah gives you a fresh start. He does not hold the favor of forgiveness and mercy over your head, nor does He remind you of your sin or label you for it. This is the true essence of forgiveness. You and I should take this to heart. Let's say for example that you know a person who committed a sin, such as theft, and then repented to God and to the one he or she stole from. As this person had come clean before his or her Lord, and before society, the sin is forgiven. You should never refer to this person as 'the thief,' nor should you shame him or her in public or private. Allah, our Lord, is the most merciful, the always forgiving and He is our greatest teacher.

Verse 38

We said, 'Get out, all of you! But when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly

will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve- (Chapter 2: Verse 38)

In this verse, God used the plural form 'all of you' to address Adam, why? In order to understand this point we must examine the following verse:

We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' and they did. But not Iblis: he was not one of those who bowed down. (7:11)

In this verse, the words 'you' are addressed in the plural form because God wants to direct our attention to the fact that the entire progeny of Adam was created within him at the time of creation........Does that mean that you and I existed within Adam at that moment? The answer is simply Yes. That is why God used the plural form addressing entire mankind until the day of resurrection.

Here is another verse we should pause and ponder.

He said, 'Get down both of you from it, all together, being enemies of one another! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance will not go astray, nor will they be miserable (20:123).

The first command in this verse came in the dual form 'both of you.' Then came the phrase 'all together'. How can this be? We answer that the first command 'both of you' signifies the presence of two camps; two sides opposing each other: The side of Adam and his righteous followers, supported by God's message; and the side of Satan and his misguided followers. Allah wants to draw your attention to the fact that His message and curriculum on earth began their mission from day one. While there are two camps on earth, that of God and that of Satan, each one of us has individual responsibility, duty, and will be accountable for his or her actions as an individual.

All the verses above signify the fact that Adam's descent and mission on earth is related to faith, religion, and their application. This is clear in the phrase '**but when guidance comes from Me as it certainly will.**' Even

before Adam and Eve descended to earth, Allah had taught them the words of repentance and guided them back towards the correct path. Guidance is of two types: On one hand, it means to direct a person towards good and the path leading to it. And on the other hand, it means to assist those already on the right path to quickly achieve their goal and gain a higher rank closer to Allah. The 38th verse of 'The Cow' is an example of the first type of guidance as God is promising to show mankind the right path and the best way to paradise. The following verse is an example of the 2nd type of guidance as Allah assists those on His path towards greater good. He says:

And those who attained the right path - Allah increases the guidance for them and bestows their piety to them. (47:17)

Now we come to the last part of the verse as God says: ' **there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve** '..........So what is fear and what is grief? Fear is to suspect the coming of harm and evil without having the ability to stop it, thus you feel alarmed, worried and fearful. Grief, on the other hand, is the loss of what is dear to you; sadness over a missed opportunity of benefit and gain.

Let's take them one by one. Allah is telling you that if you follow the path of faith which He outlined for you and revealed in His religion, then there is nothing to fear. You will have no worry as Allah has guaranteed the outcome and reward of your hard work. No one can supersede or change God's judgment. So when you live life according to the teachings of your creator, you will have nothing to fear. Let's take an example of our social and civil life. A person who obeys the law, leads an honest life, and does not commit any crime or wrong anyone never feels fearful. A criminal on the other hand is always worried, looking over his shoulder lest he or she is exposed. A criminal is always fearful about the unpredictable consequences of the crime, and lives in constant state of grief about missed opportunities. Similarly, when you live your life according to God's teachings, you would have no fear about the consequences of your actions. When you avoid sin, you avoid the fear of punishment, and if you happen to weaken for a moment and make a mistake, you can always repent to Allah, and enjoy His limitless mercy and forgiveness. More importantly, if you fall on hard times, or have trouble in your life which you have no control over, you always have God in mind. He wants the best for you; and even if you do not understand the wisdom behind bad events in your life, you have full faith in your creator, His wisdom, and love for you. God's remembrance and company brings calm and tranquillity to the troubled heart. Allah says:

those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God- truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace- (13:28)

Now that we covered fear, let's turn to grief and sorrow. God says '**Nor will they grieve.**' A true believer feels one with the universe at all time. A believer surrenders his or her will to God and knows that whatever happens in life -regardless of how it may appear- will be for the ultimate good in this life and the next. The entire universe functions according to God's will. A true believer also lives a life consistent with God's teachings. Thus he or she feels content and lives in harmony with the world around. The universe embraces the one who, just like it, spends his or her time in God's praise, remembrance and in prayer. A person with this type of bond with his or her creator, with this kind of content in his or her heart can deal with any adversity in peace and greets all life events with gratitude to Allah regardless of the nature of these events. All true good and all blessings are within God's path.

"I praise You my Lord for You judgements and whatever You have destined. The praise of satisfaction for Your judgements and certainty in Your wisdoms"

Here is the natural question to ask. Does all this mean that a true believer is always happy? The answer is simply: No. We are human, any person will react to events and circumstances in his or her life. There is a difference, however, between reacting to the circumstances alone, and reacting to events while keeping God and His wisdom behind these events in mind. Let's take the example of our beloved Prophet Muhammad who taught us this distinction when He (peace be upon him) said: "The eye weeps and the heart grieves. We say nothing except what pleases our Lord. O' My son Ibrahim, we are grieved at your departure." Each one of us should take pause and examine the state of faith of Prophet Muhammad under the worst situation imaginable -the loss of his beloved son-. The eye naturally weeps, and the heart does not remain hard like a stone, rather it feels pain, sorrow and compassion. At the same time, the whole being submits to God and values His wisdom and will.

Allah is the source of strength and tranquillity. He does not want you to encounter adversities with grief alone; He wants you to accompany grief with faith. God respects your human nature and does not stop you from feeling pain and sadness. At the same time, He gives you the tools of faith to see the events in your life from a greater perspective. When you

go to an orthopaedic surgeon after an accident. He or she may purposefully break one of your bones in order to correctly re-align it and allow your body to heal faster. Is the surgeon doing good or bad? Obviously, when you see the whole picture, he is doing what is right for your body even though this may cause you pain.

Verse 39

“And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs - those will be companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally." (Chapter 2: Verse 39)

In the previous verse, God informed us that Adam will be given guidance and a curriculum from Him to follow on earth. Whoever believes and properly applies it will have nothing to fear in this world, or worry about in the next. In this verse, we are presented with the contrasting image of the disbelievers. God began with the phrase: ‘**and those who disbelieve and deny Our signs**.’ Disbelief, as we explained earlier, is the effort to conceal the existence of Allah. And the effort to conceal something is, in by itself, proof that it exists.

In fact in order to conceal something, it has to be present and understood by the mind first. When someone tells you about something that does not exist, you find it hard to understand. You have to relate it to what you already know by saying: it is big like this mountain or blue like this lake and so on. Once you understand something, you will have a name assigned to it. A rocket, for example, did not exist, and thus did not have a name until it was created. Neither, did the word laser exist until it was discovered.

Let's apply that concept to the word 'God.' If you do a search within every present language and within every language that ever existed, you will find that each one of them has a word for ‘God’. In fact, when God – Who is unseen- name is mentioned, it is understood by everyone whether little or old, ignorant or learned, the one who travelled the world and the one who never left his or her hometown. All of these people know God through the nature of faith and the instinct which He instilled within our hearts.

Allah continues: ‘**and deny Our signs’**. The word 'signs' is translated from the Arabic origin 'Ayat'. The word 'Ayat' applies to three things. First are universal signs such as the sun, moon, stars, earth, and the oceans. Allah created these signs in a manner that far surpasses the ability of humans, so they may serve as indicators and reminders of the existence of a greater power. Miracles are also known as signs. When Allah sends a Messenger to a nation, He grants him the ability to do what is against the laws of nature. This proves to the people that he is sent from God. Believers are often attacked for their faith, and they go through hardships which necessitates a miracle that strengthens and steadies them on the straight path. Lastly, The word ‘Aayat' is used for verses of the Noble Quran. These miraculous words of God confirm the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad until the day of judgement, and serve to strengthen the believers at times of hardship.

The verse explains that those who deny God's signs are disbelievers, and they are the ones who reject and oppose faith. But isn't denial the result of the inability to understand? The answer is, more often than not, denial is intentional. Take for example the people of Pharaoh who were afflicted by trials, difficulties, and diseases that struck them so that they may turn to God and believe. However, despite being certain that these are signs from Allah they persisted in their denial as explained in the following verse:

They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true. See how those who spread corruption met their end! (27:14)

Out of mercy and compassion for mankind, Allah made his signs clear, magnificent, and numerous. If anyone takes a little bit of time to pay attention and study any of these signs, each would surely lead him or her to the creator. But sadly, many people either ignore, deny, or attribute these signs to other than God. This denial often stems from the desire to follow and pursue the inclinations and whims of one's self.

God grouped those who disbelieve and those who deny His signs under one punishment. He says: ‘**those will be companions of the fire.’** A companion is someone who is fond with his or her mate and likes to spend time together. Hence, ‘companions of the fire’ means that hellfire has passion for the disbelievers. It literally rejoices as the disbelievers enter it, similar to the happiness of a person upon the arrival of his or her dear friend. God says:

On that Day We will ask Hell, "Are you filled?" And it will answer, "Is there yet more for me?" (50:30)

Here you can see the intensity of love between Hellfire and the disbelievers. The joy comes from performing the duty that it was created for by burning the disbelievers, sinners and hypocrites as they disbelieved and caused corruption on earth. Likewise, paradise loves the companionship of every person who believed in God and applied His teachings in sincerity. God says:

As for those who believe and do good, righteous deeds, and have humbled themselves before their Lord, they are the companions of Paradise; they will abide therein. (11:23)

Paradise accompanies the believers, loves them and clings to them, just as the fire escorts the disbelievers and the deniers and feels satisfaction when burning them. These companionships are eternal, never to change, subside or decrease. God says:

These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter: their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be helped. (02:86)

Always keep in mind that Adam (peace be upon him) descended to earth while carrying with him the guidance and practice of the first heavenly curriculum on earth. God never left man on earth, not even for a single moment, without granting him the guidance that illuminates for him the right path. Moreover, within the curriculum, Allah legislated repentance and forgiveness so that you and I do not feel hopeless or despair from our mistakes. Allah who created you is the most Merciful; He opened wide for you the doors mercy, and the doors of paradise. When you make a mistake, or commit sin, always remember repentance and move back to your creator. Faith is available to whoever wants to follow God's path, and forgiveness is ever present for whoever happens to deviate from it.

Verse 40

O' Children of Israel, remember the favors I bestowed on you. Honor your pledge to Me and I will honor My pledge to you: I am the One you should fear. (Chapter 2: Verse 40)

God narrated to us the story of the creation of the human race. He told us about the initial experiment of applying God’s laws in the garden as Satan tempted Adam into disobedience. Adam then descended to earth and began his mission armed with God’s curriculum, and protected with repentance and mercy.

Now, Allah introduces the procession of His heavenly revelations and how they were received by the descendants of Adam. God selected the story of the children of Israel because it revolves around numerous Prophets and numerous miracles that were sent to them. This large number of prophets does not reflect that the children of Israel were favored. Rather, many Prophets were sent because they repeatedly indulged in sins after receiving guidance. Whenever a miracle came to them, they deviated away from it; and as other miracles followed, so did the rejection. Thus, and due to their actions, God decreed to disperse them all over the land only to be gathered again in one place to taste the torment and punishment for their sins and defiance. That is why the story of the children of Israel occupied a large part of the Holy Book. It was also mentioned again and again to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Moses, after all, was amongst the great prophets who faced tough challenges and immense tribulations. We should all learn from this story.

The verse starts with the phrase: '**O children of Israel.**' When God wants to address entire mankind He says: 'O children of Adam' as the following verse illustrates:

O children of Adam! Dress cleanly and beautifully for every act of worship; and eat and drink, but do not be wasteful: indeed, He does not love the wasteful. (7:31)

God uses this address to remind us of His blessings since the beginning of creation. Countless bounties are granted specially and specifically to mankind. Allah created Adam with his hands and commanded the angels to prostrate before him. He prepared for us a universe filled with all that guarantees the continuation of life. Not only did Allah provide the essentials, but He also furnished us with the beautiful and the luxurious. More importantly, God familiarized Adam with the false temptations of Satan and made him acknowledge that Satan is his enemy. Allah taught us the words of repentance and showered each one of us with bounties that cannot be counted. The words **'O' Children of Adam**,' should remind you of all of these blessings and bring your heart closer to Allah with love. Moreover, you should feel ashamed to reciprocate such great favors with sins. Isn't it then incumbent upon you and me to remain grateful and worship God throughout our life in this world?

This brings us back to the beginning of the verse. God said: '**O children of Israel'**. Who is Israel and why was his name chosen? The name Israel is derived from two words: 'Isra' and 'El'. 'Isra' refers to a chosen worshipper, while 'El' means God in Hebrew. Thus, the word means the one chosen by God. This designation and this name are specific to Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him) and do not include his descendants. How did Prophet Jacob gain this title, you may ask? He was named Israel because he held strong to faith while he was afflicted by great trials from God. Accordingly, when God addresses the people of Moses with the title 'O' children of Israel,' He wants to remind them of the status of prophet Jacob, of the trials he faced and endured for the sake of Allah. God wants the Israelites to remember prophet Jacob's advise when he was on his death bed mentioned in the following verse:

and commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob: 'My sons, God has chosen your religion for you, so make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment.' Were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he said to his children, 'What will you worship after me?' They said, 'We will worship your God, and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, the One God,

and to Him do we submit.' (2:132, 133)

The hour of death is the critical time where every person becomes honest with him or herself, with his Lord and with his children. Only the most valuable truths are spoken at that time. Jacob reminded his children that God is one, none are associated with Him. God has blessed and honored them with religion, thus they must cherish and hold on to His teachings till death. So, when God says: '**O children of Israel**,' He is reminding all the descendants of prophet Jacob of their father's wisdom, patience and values. Perhaps they will follow His example and perhaps they will feel embarrassed to indulge in sins. This is similar to the example of a righteous man's child who is reckless and corrupt, as a result, He is often asked by people who knew his father: don't you not feel ashamed? How can you do these acts? You are the son of a good man.

Here is an interesting point to note. Israel is Jacob the son of Isaac. Abraham fathered both Isaac and Ishmael (peace be upon them). Our Prophet Muhammad is from the descendants of Ishmael. Allah says: '**O Children of Israel, remember My favor which I have bestowed upon you**,' yet, when God addresses the Muslims He does not say 'O' sons of Ishmael remember my favors upon you.' Rather, when God addresses the Muslims He says: '**O' you who believe, Remember God**.' Why is it so? It is because the children of Israel are materialistic and worldly people, therefore, God reminds them of His materialistic favors upon them. There is a difference between being in the company of favors, and being in the company of the One who grants favors. Materialistic people love favors regardless of who grants them, while non-materialistic people prefer the company of the One who grants favors. Thus, Muslims are addressed with 'remember God' while the children of Israel are addressed with: 'remember the favors of God'.

God praises His servants in front of angels and says: They worship me for my sake. The angels reply: rather they worship you for the sake of your blessings and favors. Allah says: If I withhold my blessings from them, they will still love me. And amongst My servants are those whose supplication is very dear to me. I afflict them with adversities so that they invoke me and say: 'O Lord'.

Allah is indeed worthy of being worshipped even if He did not create paradise and hell. God says in a sacred narration: "I am worthy of being revered, so whoever fears me and does not associate another deity with Me, then He is worthy of my mercy."

God loves the supplications and the company of true believers. In fact,

the believers are often tested with afflictions and troubles. Let's take the example of one of God's greatest bounties: health. When a person is tested and the blessing of health is taken away from him, you may view at this as being unlucky, or falling out of favor with God. But, before you rush to judgment, listen to the following sacred narration:

God says “O son of Adam I was sick and you did not visit Me. He will say: My Lord, how can I visit You?….You are the Lord of the worlds. Allah answers: Didn't you know that My servant so and so was sick, yet you did not visit him? Didn't you not that if you had visited him you would have found Me there with him?” Thus, when the blessing of health is taken away from a believer, he should never despair, because all the time he spends in sickness he remains in God’s company.

Remembrance is a guard against forgetfulness. Our daily routine often makes us forget the provider of the blessings in our lives. The sun rises every day providing life and warmth, but how many of us take time to remember that it does not rise without the God's permission and mercy? Likewise, it rains every now and then, but how often do we stop to thank God for this great bounty? Allah maybe unseen, but His favors are not. They are ever present to confirm His existence and mercy. It is through remembrance that we keep Allah in mind and remain ever grateful for His blessings. Remembrance of God is done by both, the tongue and the heart. It takes you to a safe haven where no trouble or evil can harm you. It generates reverence in the heart, decreases sin, and makes the movement of life upright.

Similarly, when God asked the children of Israel to remember the favors He blessed them with, it should have been natural for them to remember and obey the provider of these favors.

The verse continues: ‘**Honor your pledge to Me and I will honor My pledge to you**’ the word pledge comes from the Arabic origin 'عهد ' which means covenant. It is an agreement between the servant and his Lord. God says:

Assuredly We had made a covenant with Adam, but he acted forgetfully. We did not find resolve in him (20:115)

The natural question to ask is: Which covenant is God asking the children of Israel to fulfill? To properly answer this question, we have to consider the three pledges between man and God that are mentioned in the Quran. Let's take them one by one.

First: the pledge referred to in the verse could be the pledge of faith. It is the covenant to believe in God and show gratitude for His blessings. It is the innate instinct within each one of us that urges the search for our creator, and the feeling of gratitude for all we have. Let's clarify this with an example. If a person gets lost in the desert and cannot see anything alive around him for miles. Then he lays down to rest and takes a short nap. When he wakes up, he finds a table filled with all kinds of food, drink and sweets right in front of him. Before even touching the food, wouldn't he ask himself: who did this? Wouldn't he, before taking a single bite, try to find out and thank whoever set this table up? It is within our human nature. Similarly, each one of us comes into this world to find everything set up for our survival and comfort. The sun, earth, soil, animals and all that is around us are perfectly suited to support our lives. Isn't it also part of our natural instinct to wonder about the maker of all that is around us? If you take a moment to ponder, you would have to conclude that there is a creator. Even more telling: all these creations are beyond the powers and abilities of humans. Thus, it should be no surprise to anyone when Allah sends a Messenger or a prophet, supported by miracles, to inform mankind that He is the one who created.

Accordingly, taking time to remember and be mindful of Allah, to be grateful for all his favors and gifts is a must. It does not require any complex theories or philosophies. Fulfilling your pledge to God demands that you worship Him and pay your gratitude to Him. He says:

So remember Me; I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and never ungrateful. (2:152)

and in another verse:

O you who believe! If you help God’s cause, He will help you and make your feet firm (47:7)

What is the most important point in these verses? It is that Allah has placed the key to paradise in your hands. Right at this minute, you hold in your hand the key to the path that will lead you to heaven, and the key to the path that will end in hellfire. If you fulfill your promise to God, He will fulfill His promise to you. If you remember Him, He will remember you, and if you help His cause on earth, He will be with you in this world and the next…….You have to take the first step.

Allah says in a sacred narration: *"I treat My servant as he hopes that I would treat him. I am with him whenever he remembers Me: if he remembers Me in his heart, I remember him in Mine; if he remembers*

Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering far better; if he draws near towards Me a hand's span, I draw near towards him an arm's length; if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a mile; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running."

Second: We also have to consider the covenant God took from the Prophets. They pledged that when a new Prophet comes to them confirming what is within their own scriptures, it will be their duty to follow and aid the new prophet. God took a covenant from all His messengers to support prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He says:

God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' They said, 'We do.' He said, 'Then bear witness and I too will bear witness.'(3:81)

And third: There is the covenant God took from the scholars of the children of Israel at the time of prophet Moses. They pledged to receive the Torah, learn it, preserve it, and most importantly, they pledged not conceal anything from it as the following verse illustrates:

God took a pledge from those who were given the Scripture- 'Make it known to people; do not conceal it'- but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders, they bartered it for a small price: what a bad bargain they made! (3:187)

Part of the objective of this promise was not to conceal what the Torah and the gospel mentioned about Islam and about the attributes of the coming Messenger Muhammad. God had described the characteristics of Prophet Muhammad in both Torah and Gospel. He says:

Now that God has sent them this Book, which confirms their Scriptures, they deny it! even though before that they were praying for victory over the disbelievers Yet when it was sent to them, they recognized it and chose to disbelieve in it! The disbelievers are cursed by God. (2:89)

Having studied the Torah, the scholars of the children of Israel were certain of the authenticity of the Quran, but they insisted on disbelief because Muhammad was not from their ranks. Similarly, the scholars of the scriptures were convinced that the Quran revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the seal of all heavenly scriptures. They knew

that it was their duty to support the new message. Sadly, not only did most of them abandon their convictions, but they also led their followers astray.

Whether the verse at hand refers to the pledge of faith within each one of us, or to the pledge God took from His prophets, or the pledge of the people of the scriptures, they all converge to one central point: Belief in Allah, gratitude for His bounties, and support for His new message, the message of Islam.

God promises that when the children of Israel fulfill their part of the pledge, He will do the same. God says: '**I will honor My pledge to you**' referring to His promise of paradise and great reward in the hereafter. More specifically, Allah promised His mercy to those who believe in Muhammad (peace be upon him) after the revelation of Islam. Listen to the following verse as Allah responds to Moses and his people supplicating for mercy after they experienced an earthquake.

Grant us good things in this world and in the life to come. We turn to You.' God said, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. 'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the Messenger- the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the iron collars that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed.' (7:156-157)

The last part of the verse ends with a warning. God says: '**I am the One you should fear.'** When honoring your pledge and duty toward Allah, you should keep in mind that there is no power or force in the universe other than that of God. Nothing happens outside His control. Most importantly, you are destined to meet your Lord on the day of judgment, and you will be asked about your deeds and your commitments.

Verse 41

And believe in what I have sent down which verifies what is already with you; and do not be the first to deny it, and do not exchange My signs for a small price; and beware of Me. (Chapter 2: Verse 41).

In the previous verse God reminded the children of Israel of the covenants they made. We discussed the covenant of faith, the covenant to preserve the Torah from alterations and share it in its entirety, and the covenant to believe in the Messenger of God whose characteristics are described in the Torah and the gospel. In fact, the description of Prophet Muhammad was so specific that the Jewish rabbi Ibn Salam used to say to his people of Medina: I recognized Muhammad the moment I laid my eyes on him. I recognized him with the certainty I recognize my own son with.

In this verse God refers to this knowledge and says '**And believe in what I have sent down which verifies what is already with you.**' The Quran is a confirmation of the Torah -The true complete Torah before parts of it were altered and concealed.-

God continues: **'and do not be the first to deny it.'** The Jewish tribes of Arabia were not the first to disbelieve in Muhammad (peace be upon him), rather, it was the prophet's own tribe: Quraysh. The verse, however, is referring to the first to disbelieve from amongst the people of the scripture. Why? Because Quraysh had no link to the heavens, neither were they aware of the previous revelations, or the coming of a prophet. The Jewish rabbis, on the other hand, knew the truth and used to invoke support from the coming Prophet over their enemies in Medina. They used to say: 'The time for a messenger from God is very near; we shall believe in him and we shall fight you with him, and rule over you'. But

when Islam came, rather than being the first to haste towards it, they were the first to disbelieve in it.

Allah foretold the people of the book about the coming of a prophet; He did not conceal or surprise them with the new message. That is why it was incumbent upon them to be the first to believe and the first to support the new message.

The verse continues: '**and do not exchange My signs for a small price.**' Whenever God talks about the transaction of faith, He uses the words 'selling, buying and trading'. Take the example of the following verses:

God has bought from the believers their selves and wealth because Paradise is for them. They fight in God's cause, and they kill or are killed. This is a promise with which God has bound Himself in the Torah and in the Gospel and in the Qur'an. Who could be more faithful to his covenant than God? So glad tidings to you because of the bargain you have made with Him! That indeed is the supreme triumph. (9:111)

and in another verse:

O you who have faith! Shall I show you a trade that will deliver you from a painful punishment? Have faith in God and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons—that is better for you, if only you knew- (61:10-11)

We know that trade is a mediation between the producer and the consumer. The producer wants to sell a product, and the consumer is in need of that product. It is within our human nature to want a good deal, and to search for the biggest profit. Here, Allah utilized trade to turn our attention towards a great deal and a sure way of earning huge profit. Worldly gain in business is based on the effort you put in, your competitors, and the advantages you have. Earning a profit from God, on the other hand, is based on God's ability, so it is limitless and eternal. Here is the deal: In exchange for self-restraint and a small part of your freedom in life, Allah will grant you immense pleasure and eternal freedom in Paradise.

Take a moment to think about your short time on earth. How many years will you live? Fifty.. sixty.. a hundred and ten? You quickly realize that the wise person is the one who sacrifices some freedom in this short and fleeting life in exchange for a share of eternal happiness in the hereafter. For this small investment, you receive great returns. The deal is in fact outrageously profitable. Remember that the pleasure in this world is

according to the capabilities of humans while pleasure in the hereafter is according to the powers of God.

Let's look at the opposite deal which is popular nowadays. Some say: I want to take advantage of my short time on earth......I want to enjoy life to the fullest.....Why should I deprive myself of anything? We will all die anyway. We answer that the torment and punishment in the afterlife is not equal to the small gain you earn by transgressing in life. Hence, you are earning yourself a terrible deal, and your loss is huge. Anyone who exchanges something valuable and permanent for a something invaluable and temporary has made an awful business deal.

This brings us back to the verse. God is advising the children of Israel against making this terrible deal. He says: **'and do not exchange My signs for a small price'** meaning do not give away faith, and the gift of the scriptures in exchange for temporary advantage and status in this world. When a person attains much less than that what he gave, then he or she is a loser.

God's signs and words are invaluable. If you alter His words, take them out of context, or conceal them to satisfy a need or to gain an advantage, then you have reversed the deal of faith. The outcome is clear and eternal: hellfire. In fact this verse is very accurate in describing the reversal of the deal. In our daily trade, we pay a price and receive goods in return. However, in the verse: '**and do not exchange My signs for a small price'** the opposite has happened: A price is bought and the goods are paid. It is a true repudiation of the covenant with God.

Price is always tangible, such as paper money, gold and silver. It is a mean not an end. Suppose, for example, that you owned millions of dollars, but you were stranded in the desert starving. Is that money of any benefit to you? Can you eat it? Drink it? Won't you at that moment give it all away for a small meal? Hence, wealth should not be made the purpose of life. If you consider it as your purpose, you will waste your time amassing large amount of it, not for any good use, nor for the benefit of your family. Money becomes an obsession, and this can only lead to greed and corruption.

Wealth is a good servant but it is a terrible master. Wealth can be your servant when you spend it and invest it for the betterment of your family and community. On the other hand, when you store wealth, have an inordinate desire to accumulate it, and spend your time worrying about

managing it, and then it becomes your master and makes you miserable. The focus of the children of Israel in life has been wealth accumulation. God made usury (modern day interest) unlawful because it turns money from a tool into an objective. Wealth is supposed to increase through working and producing something beneficial; but if it increases without work, rather by taking advantage of others, then the life cycle becomes corrupted. The working poor increase in poverty and the rich get richer through lending and usury. This is exactly what we observe in the world today.

Poor countries are getting poorer because they borrow interest bearing loans. As interest accumulates, the burden of debt increases. On many occasions, the amount of interest owed to the lender becomes greater than the original loan itself. With the passage of time, repayment becomes difficult, sometimes impossible. At the same time, and without producing anything beneficial, the rich get richer because they give the loan and then collect it back many folds over.

When you read the verse: **'And do not exchange My signs for a small price,'** you should not think that God's signs can be sold or exchanged for a large price. No! Regardless of the price, it will always be small when compared to God's guidance.

God continues: **'and be aware of me.'** This statement is an advice for today. In the previous verse when God says: **'and fear me,'** it was a warning about the future. By being aware and mindful of God in all our daily actions, we avoid His anger and punishment in the hereafter. God Almighty commands us to fear Him, while at the same time He says: '**fear the hellfire**'. How could this be? God is the source of all mercy and compassion, while Hellfire is the ultimate torment. We answer that Allah wants you to construct a barrier between yourself and the fire. He wants to protect you against the punishment that can only result from His anger. Thus, '**fear** Me' means fear My anger so that this great punishment does not afflict you. But how do you construct this wall between you and God's anger? You can do this by being mindful of Allah and by choosing actions in this world that correspond to His teachings.

Now we move on to the next verse:

God says:

verse 42

And do not mix the truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know. (Chapter 2: Verse 42)

The previous verse delivered a warning against exchanging faith for a small worldly gain, be it wealth or power. This verse cautions the children of Israel against mixing the truth with falsehood. The verb 'mix' is translated from the Arabic origin ‘تلبسوا’ which means to wear or to cover. It is often used referring to the clothes we wear. God is presenting the example of dressing the truth with lies in order to cover it and present it as falsehood.

Truth is the absolute established fact which does not change. Suppose that we witnessed an event, such as an accident, and then each one of us narrates what he or she saw. If we were truthful, all our statements will be consistent, and in line with the event. But if amongst us is someone who is altering the facts, then there would be many narrations, and the truth may be lost.

Similarly, there are verses in the Torah that the children of Israel did not distort, and there are some that were omitted or changed. The verses that are related to the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and his description were altered. The end result is a book that mixes truth with falsehood. What drove them to insert falsehoods and conceal some facts, you may ask? Their primary interest was to exchange God’s verses with a small price, to gain status and temporary power over people.

Sometimes, even a small change takes things completely out of context and turns truth into lies. God wants to bring to our attention that these alterations did not happen out of forgetfulness or oversight. Rather they were done with full intension. Let’s look at the following verse in which

God addressed the Israelites accompanying Prophet Moses:

Remember when We said, 'Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but enter its gate humbly and say, "Relieve us of our burdens" Then We shall forgive you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good.' But the wrongdoers substituted a different word from the one they had been given. So, because they persistently disobeyed, We sent a plague down from the heavens upon the wrongdoers. (02:58-59)

In this example, the Israelites accompanying Prophet Moses were ordered to say 'Hitta' which is a word for repentance. In exchange, they would be forgiven for their previous actions and be granted access to the Holy land. But some, out of arrogance and ridicule, distorted the word of God and said 'hinta' which is a type of grain. Whoever heard them may not recognize the subtle difference, because they deliberately chose what they said in order to disobey their Lord.

Similar instances happened during the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.) When they met with the prophet, some of the Jewish residents of Medina used to twist their tongues and change the common greeting 'Al Salamu Alykom' which means 'Peace be upon you' to 'Al Sam Alykom' which means 'Poison be upon you'. This greatly bothered the companions, so our beloved prophet told them to reply with a simple 'wa alykom' meaning 'and the same to you.'

Keep in mind that a those who mix truth with vanity and falsehood often do so when they unable to handle the truth or afraid to face it. Weakness and cowardice cause men to lie. The truth, on many occasions, is difficult and may exhaust men as they have to hold to it under all circumstances.

The end of the verse states: **'Nor conceal the truth while you know.'** Here again Allah is reminding us that these actions of lying and distorting the truth were deliberate, not out of ignorance or forgetfulness. You may sometimes conceal some matters, not knowing that they were the truth. But from the examples above, we see that the phrase '**While you know**' reflects the great sin of the children of Israel and its disastrous results. It shows that they acted while fully knowing what will befall them in the hereafter, and the torment awaiting in Hellfire.

Verse 43

And maintain the prayer, and give the zakat, and bow along with those who bow (Chapter 2: verse 43)

Establishing prayer is well known. It is commenced with the takbir (the phrase ‘God is greater’ and it concludes with tasleem (which is the offering of peace and greetings to the Prophet, his family, and all the believers). Prayer is carried out in a specific manner that includes standing, bowing and prostration. In this verse, Allah addresses the children of Israel and asks them to give almsgiving, and bow along with those who bow. Bowing is a reference to prayer in Islam, as prayer in Judaism does not include bowing. In other words, Allah is inviting the Jewish people to join the new faith that they were informed about. More importantly, God wants them to believe in Prophet Muhammad, and not to think that their faith in Prophet Moses and his message will suffice. From the moment the new revelation came to Muhammad, they could no longer say that our religion is sufficient and Islam has only came for those who do not have a religion. Allah answers: **‘and bow along with those who bow’** because He wants them to realize that their prayer (which includes prostration but not bowing) is no longer adequate.

Perhaps, the most important point to remember is that the children of Israel's faith in Moses and the Torah requires that they believe in Muhammad and the message of Islam. All the prophet of the Israelites and all their revelations instruct them to do so. Thus, the lack of faith in Muhammad is a sign of disbelief in the Torah and a contradiction to its teachings. When God said in the 41st verse of 'The Cow': **‘and do not exchange My signs for a small price,'** He was warning them against disregarding these teachings and what was revealed to them about Muhammad and the new message. The true believer amongst them would choose to follow his or her faith and believe in the seal of the Prophets: Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Prayer is the act of standing before one's Lord. When you stand before

Allah, any feelings of pride and arrogance should leave your heart, and in their place a sense of reverence, submission and humbleness should flourish. God is asking the children of Israel to first and foremost perform prayer as it will help to extinguish any pride they may have against the new religion.

The command to join the Muslims in prayer is followed by the command to pay almsgiving (zakah.) God commanded you to strive on earth, not only to earn what satisfies your needs and then stop, but He also wants you to bring in more so you can help anyone unable to earn a living. It is through giving that you can turn the society into a welcoming place for everyone; a place that leaves no room for hatred and envy.

We continue to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

verse 44

How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense? (Chapter 2: Verse 44)

God made it clear to the Children of Israel that their disbelief in the message of Islam is in fact a disbelief in the teaching of the Torah. The scriptures, after all, gave a detailed description of Prophet Muhammad. In this verse God is reprimanding them with a question: '**How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture?**' The Jewish tribes of Medina often boasted the near arrival of a new Messenger and announced to the Arab tribes that they will believe and fight for him. But when the new Prophet emerged from amongst the Arabs, they understood that they may lose

their social and economic status, and, thus, they were the first to disbelieve.

It is very important to note that while these verses were revealed addressing the children of Israel; that does not mean that they apply only to them. Rather, these verses apply to all people of scripture, the disbelievers, and any Muslim who trades God's signs for a small gain. Sadly, there are many who take the words of the Quran out of context in exchange for influence or political power.

During his ascent to the heavens in the night journey, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) saw a group of people being tormented by having their lips and tongues sliced with molten blades. He questioned Gabriel: 'Who are they?' Gabriel answered: 'They were the spokesmen for injustice, the ones who distorted religion according to their desires and the desires of unjust rulers.

The purpose of religion is to reign in human whims and greed, and shape society according to God's teachings. The people and the Imams of mischief try -in the name of religion- to do the exact opposite. They give people an excuse for sin. A true religious scholar can never justify evil actions, nor can he or she bend God's teachings to satisfy human inclinations. It is not sufficient for those who do so to repent, they must also correct what they have done.

The phrase '**How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves?'** brings up a very important point about those who invite others to faith. If you preach well to others and forbid them from evil, you are in effect, trying to bring them out of actions that they are accustomed to. As you well know, breaking a habit is a difficult task. Moreover, you are asking someone to admit that they were wrong in their beliefs and actions. A person who is about to change his or her beliefs and break long term habits is going to look at you with very critical eye. Do you adhere to your own statements and recommendations? If you do, then the person you are preaching to becomes confident in you and your message. If, on the other hand, it turns out that you don't do as you say, then that will not only undermine you, but it will undermine the message of Islam.

Faith is the words we say and the actions we take. If our words are not in line with our behaviour, then all is lost. God says:

O you who believe! Why do you say what you do not do? How despicable it is in the sight of Allah that you should say what you do

not do. (61:2-3)

We should always lead by example as the following verse illustrates:

Assuredly you have in God's Messenger an excellent example to follow for whoever looks forward to God and the Last Day, and remembers and mentions God much. (33:21)

Being aware of the religious doctrines is not sufficient; it has to be put to practice. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not enjoin others to any act unless he was the first to put it into practice. The companions saw in him the best example of words and actions.

When Omar Ibn Al-khattab wanted to issue a new law, he used to invite his family and relatives and say to them: I want to order people to do so and so. Beware, whoever breaks the law amongst you, I will surely make out of him or her an example for all Muslims. This is how Omar closed the doors of corruption, as he knew how corruption could creeps into society.

When it comes to the science of Islamic theology, religious scholars and preachers have to be role models. Good conduct is not required by experts in other fields. If you were told, for example, that this great chemist is an adulterer, you can reply that I benefit from his knowledge in chemistry because he has mastered it; his personal conduct, on the other hand, is his own burden. Likewise is the case with every worldly scholar. But in case of a religious scholar who guides you towards the correct path, adultery or stealing cannot be tolerated.

People look up to such a person and examine him closely. Will you listen to a hypocrite preacher? Never! In fact he will hold no value to you regardless of how much he has excelled in knowledge.

Islam was preached through good conduct. Early converts were impressed by the good manners of Muslims. Islam spread in China through the Muslim merchants who were known for their honesty and fairness. They inspired many around them. God says:

Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am from amongst the Muslims'? (41:33)

This verse highlights for us the three conditions of preaching: the first is calling towards God, and the second is doing righteous deeds. The last is to say 'Indeed I am one of the Muslims,' which in effect gives credit to God and His message, not to the preacher himself. What is point of

saying that we are Muslims while do not behave like ones?

This brings us back to the verse that addressed the children of Israel ‘**How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense?**’

Verse 45

And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humble (Chapter 2: Verse 45)

In the previous verse, Allah stressed to the children of Israel, and to all believers, that faith has to be equally expressed in actions and words. He also reminded them to practice what they preached and follow Prophet Muhammad. In this verse, God is giving us the tools to properly perform this task. '**And seek help through patience and prayer'** reflects that difficulties and hardship will occur. Things will not be easy for those who follow the new message.

Patience helps us tolerate tough times. The children of Israel were used to exchanging God’s signs for the small price of worldly enjoyments; and they were accustomed to usury and other means of unlawful earnings. Thus, returning to the right path, and letting go of these bad habits would not be easy. They need help through patience.

This concept is general as it applies to any person regardless of their religion. Anyone who wants to return to the true fold of Islam needs to seek help through patience in order to break away from old habits and adhere to religious obligations. He or she will have to face the strong urges to go back to comfortable prohibitions.

Some scholars said that patience in this verse refers to fasting. According to their interpretations, God is asking His servants to starve themselves and tolerate the pain of hunger. However, when you consider the phrase at the end of the verse that says: ' **it is difficult except for the humble,'** you realize that God is referring to something different. The hardships of faith lie in expelling all pride from the heart. When you stand before The Lord in prayer, you have to express devotion, humbleness and submission. It was pride that prevented many Israelites from believing in a religion that was not revealed upon one of their leaders and rabbis.

'**And seek help through patience and prayer'** highlights two elements that we can use for help during tough times: patience and prayer. The next part states: ' **it is difficult except for the humble,'** Is the word 'it' referring to patience being difficult, or is it referring to prayer? In order to properly study this verse we have to look at it in the Arabic origin. In Arabic grammar, there are pronouns that address the singular, pronouns that address the plural, and pronouns that address the dual. Meaning, when you address two people, you do not use the singular nor the plural, but a special pronoun. For example: the Arabic verb for write 'katab' is in the singular form, 'katabu' is used for plural, and 'kataba' is used when referring to two people who wrote. In this verse, patience and prayer is a dual. However, when Allah said '**it is difficult except for the humble'** He used the singular pronoun. Does that mean that only one of them is referred to? Is it prayer or patience that is difficult?

We answer that when two things are mentioned together, often they both are meant. Let's cite a few examples from the Quran:

They swear by God for you, to please you, and God and His messenger are more worthy to please Him, if they were believing. (9:62)

In this verse '**please him**' is mentioned with the singular pronoun instead of 'please them' (the dual pronoun). This is because both God and the Messenger have one right and represent a single truth.

God says in another verse:

Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you standing there. Say, 'God's gift is better than any entertainment or trade: God is the best provider.' (62:11)

Grammatically, the dual pronoun should have been employed because the verse is talking about two items: trade and entertainment. This is

because both trade and amusement are similar to each other as they occupy a believer from worship and remembrance.

Likewise, patience and prayer complement each other as they represent a cure against lying and self-pride. Initially, both place a burden on the sole as they interfere with our daily activities. Patience is used to keep you away from the worldly pleasures, and prayer is used to fight arrogance and pride. Patience cannot be complete without prayer and prayer cannot be mastered without patience.

The last part of the verse states '**it is difficult except for the humble'**. What is meant by humbleness? It is to recognize and obey the one who is above you in status. People vary in talents and rank. Each one tries to boast about his talents and claim 'I am better than so and so'. A person can be proud of his or her talents, but will always be humble when he or she needs the talent of another person. If you act arrogantly to the ones you need, they may shun you and hold their services from you. God granted humans different talents so each one of can be proud of his or her talents, while at the same time is humbled by the talents of others. True humbleness, however, is only due to Allah the Creator of all things in all His attributes of perfection.

God is free from need, and humbleness causes a person to acknowledge his or her own trivial importance, constant need and weakness. Whatever you may own can be taken away from you by God at the glance. Our world is subject to change and in order to protect yourself from these changes, you must submit and humble yourself before the One who does not change. Allah is the only constant.

Many people are deceived by means and causes. We say to them, worship and humble yourselves before the ultimate Benefactor and the Creator of these means and causes. A well know proverb says 'This too shall pass.' Whatever you may have for now will for sure change. A leader may take pride in his or her powers, but then another person comes who is more powerful. A person who boasts off about his or her wealth may declare bankruptcy next week. God says:

if you have suffered a blow, they too have suffered one like it. We deal out such days among people in turn, for God to find out who truly believes, for Him to choose martyrs from among you- God does not love evildoers- (3:140)

Verse 46

who think that they will meet their Lord, and that to Him will they return. (Chapter 2: Verse 46)

We highlighted that help can be obtained through patience and prayer. These acts maybe difficult to do except for the person who humbles and devotes him or herself before God; a person who approaches God's worship with love, faith and aspiration. This verse gives us the characteristics of the humble believers. They are those '**who think that they will meet their Lord**'.

Knowledge either comes from study and evidence, or from following someone you trust. For example, when you see an event with your own eyes, or when you do your own investigation, you gain knowledge. This knowledge is based on evidence, and it represents certainty. Similarly, you can learn something from your teacher, or from someone you trust. This is a lesser level of knowledge, because it is based on someone else's evidence.

On the other end of the scale, there is lack of knowledge, and there is ignorance. Lack of knowledge happens when you are simply not aware of something. Ignorance happens when you think that you know something, when you are certain that you are right, but in fact you are wrong. Ignorance is the most dangerous level of knowledge.

There are matters that fall between certainty and ignorance. These are matters of doubt, matters of possibilities and uncertainty. In this verse God is talking about those **'who think'** not those who 'are certain', or those 'who believe'…… Why? It is because the mere thought or possibility of meeting God should be enough to make a person humble him or herself before the Lord and adhere to His teachings.

Let's clarify this point with an example. Let’s say that you were travelling on a road, then a stranger comes up to you and tells you that this road is not safe………criminals and gangs often rob people here. This information will certainly make you avoid the road unless you were armed or have a large group traveling with you. Although you are not certain if the stranger's warning is accurate, you would still be cautious. The mere possibility that the stranger is right is enough for you to avoid this road. Likewise, the mere thought of meeting your Lord should be sufficient to make a you adhere to His guidance and protect yourself from the tremendous punishment.

The verse continues ' **and that to Him will they return.'** Returning to God is something we should all be preparing for. God says:

People, be mindful of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing: on the Day you see it, every nursing mother will think no more of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be God’s torment. (22:1-2)

and in another verse:

Then how will you, if you persist in unbelief, guard yourselves against a Day which will turn the children gray-headed? (73:17)

If this could be our condition on the Day of judgment, then shouldn't this knowledge be sufficient for us to follow God’s teachings? In our daily life, we take many precautions to insure ourselves and our property against worldly matters. You insure your car against accidents, and you fortify your house when the forecast calls for a possible hurricane. How can you ignore and leave yourself and your family unprotected against the horrors of the Day of Resurrection?

Now, we move to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 47

O Children of Israel, remember My favor that I have bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds. (Chapter 2: Verse 47)

This verse is another reminder for the Children of Israel of the tremendous bounties God gave them. They were favored when God sent numerous Messengers from amongst them, and they were honored with the Torah and the Gospel. This, however, does not give them any excuse not to believe in the seal of the Prophets: Muhammad. In fact, The scriptures, and all the prophets sent to the Israelites should be more reason to obey God and follow His final message. Both the Torah and the Gospel gave good tiding of the coming of Muhammad and asked all to believe and support him. Their denial reflects disbelief in the scriptures, and rejection of the bounties God gave them across the centuries.

Why this constant reminder of God's favors, you may ask? It is because the Israelites took God's favors for granted, and often abused them. The children of Israel killed many of their Prophets; They repeatedly broke their covenant with God, and exchanged His guidance for worldly gain. Sadly, these actions were not done out of ignorance, but with careful planning. The end result earned them God’s punishment. He says:

You have surely known of those amongst you who transgressed the Sabbath. We said to them: 'Be apes, despised! ' (02:65)

and in another verse:

Say: "Shall I inform you who will receive the worst chastisement from God? They who were condemned by God, and on whom fell His wrath, and those who were turned to apes and swine, and those who worship the powers of evil. They are in the worse gradation, and farthest away from the right path." (05:60)

God may grant you many favors, and He may grant you even more chances to make up for your mistakes and return back to Him. However, you should always keep in mind that blessings do not continue with continued transgression and lack of appreciation. Those who enjoy the special bounties, also bare great responsibilities. Similarly, Allah granted

the Children of Israel great favors, and even more chances to make up for their grave mistakes. One of the greatest bounties, and the greatest of opportunities God granted them to return back to Him was the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It was the perfect chance to rectify their book and return to Allah with love. Sadly, rejection and opposition happened over and over again. Thus, when you read verses detailing the punishment of the children of Israel, and how they were dispersed in the land, you should not think that this was a cruel or unwarranted outcome. God says:

And after that We said to the Children of Israel: "Dwell now securely on earth. But when the time of the last decree comes, We will gather you as a mixed crowd (17:104)

When you read the above verse, the first thought that comes to mind is: of course they will dwell on earth, where else can they go? The key point to note is that God did not specify a place or a land on earth, rather, He decreed for them to be dispersed everywhere. They will have no homeland until God wills. He says:

We declared to the Children of Israel in the Scripture, 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant.' So when the time of the fulfilment of the first of the two warnings came, We sent against you some servants of ours, possessed of great might in war, and they ravaged your houses and it was a warning that was bound to be fulfilled. Then We gave back to you your independence from them, and We supplied you with wealth and children, and We made you more influential. 'If you do good, you will do it for your own benefit, and if you do evil, it will be against yourselves'. Later, when came the time appointed for the second warning, so that they spoil your faces, and so that they enter into the Mosque as the former ones entered it the first time, and utterly destroy whatever they prevail upon. (17:4-7)

These verses talk about two episodes that involve the Children of Israel, the Holy land and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The first incident already happened during the rule of Omar ibn Al-Khattab, when the Muslim army entered Jerusalem. The Israelites have been dispersed everywhere since. Nowadays, as the verses informed, we see the mass migration of the Jewish people to the state of Israel. God gathered them as a mixed crowd with different languages and backgrounds. They have independence, wealth, children, foreign support and vast influence through the media. In case of military attack, they have access to foreign armies to aid them. Keep in mind that these verses also warned the

Muslims about losing the Aqsa Mosque, and warned the Israelites that they will reap what they saw. If they are unjust, and transgress over other's rights, they will be only hurting themselves.

Perhaps more importantly, these verses also shed light on the future of the Aqsa Mosque. God says **Later, when came the time appointed for the second warning, so that they spoil your faces, and so that they enter into the Mosque as the former ones entered it the first time, and utterly destroy whatever they prevail upon. (17:7)**

Verse 48

Have fear of a Day when no self will be able to compensate for another in any way. No intercession will be accepted from it, no ransom taken from it, and they will not be helped. (Chapter 2:Verse 48)

God is reminding all of us of the day of judgment where nothing other than good deeds will avail. Before we go into the details of this verse, let's look at another one from the same chapter:

Have fear of a Day when no self will be able to compensate for another in any way, and no ransom will be accepted from it, and no intercession benefit it, and they will not be helped. (02:123)

Is this a repetition, you may ask? The answer is simply: no. Upon close examination, you will find that the opening statement of these two verses is identical but the latter part is different. let's examine them in detail.

'Have fear of a Day' points to the Day of Resurrection, which Allah is advising us to prepare for in faith and good deeds.

'**when no self will be able to compensate for another in any way'** should draw our attention that these verses are talking about two persons. One is a sinner in trouble, and the other is a righteous person trying to help and intercede on his or her behalf. In other words, one person is asking God: 'Dear Lord! I am prepared to make up for what my friend has done, I am prepared to avail him and fulfill his right.'

Let's clarify this with an example. Suppose a king was angry with a person and decided to punish. A close friend of the ruler tries to intercede on behalf of this person. Now, it is up to the ruler to accept this intercession or decline it. If the king declines, the intercessor may move on to another strategy and offer the king to pay a ransom to bail his friend out. Similarly, on the day of resurrection, the righteous man or woman will approach God and appeal for the sinner. God says:

Allah—there is no god except Him— is the Living One, the All-sustainer. Neither drowsiness befalls Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? (02:255)

and in another verse:

He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede without His permission—indeed they themselves stand in reverence and awe of Him. (21:28)

So righteous people will try to intercede for others who transgressed in sin, but this intercession will not be accepted, neither will compensation be taken from them.

Now we can get into the intricate difference between verse 48 and verse 123 of 'The Cow'. The 48th verse, is referring to the righteous person wanting to intervene before God and compensate for the sinful one. The righteous person even offers to pay in order to make up for the sins of his or her friend. God replies: ' **No intercession will be accepted from it, no ransom taken from it**' Here, intercession is mentioned first, and then the offer of payment.

The 123rd verse, on the other hand, is referring to sinful person that is looking for help and for anyway out. Helplessness will drive this person to seek others. It is the ultimate admission of failure. On the day of judgment, the sinful person will supplicate God 'What should I do to

make amends for my sins?' I will pay all I have. Sadly, when he or she gets no response, the only other option would be to seek a person whose intercession will be considered. God answers: ' **no self will be able to compensate for another in any way, and no ransom will be accepted from it, and no intercession benefit it'**

and in another verse:

If only you could see when the sinners will stand before their Lord, heads hung low, "O Lord, we have seen and heard. So send us back. We shall do the right, for we have come to believe with certainty." (32:12)

These are the sinners who ask the Lord to allow them to return to this world so they can compensate and pay for their sins with righteous deeds. What will God reply to them? we find the answer in the following verse:

So taste it. Because you forgot the meeting of this Day, We have forgotten you. Taste the punishment of eternal timelessness for what you did.' (32:14)

and in another verse:

What are they waiting for but its fulfilment? The Day its fulfilment occurs, those who forgot it before will say, 'The Messengers of our Lord came with the Truth. Are there any intercessors to intercede for us, or can we be sent back so that we can do something other than what we did?' They have lost their own selves and what they invented has forsaken them. (07:53)

Unfortunately all these pleas will be rejected. Moreover, no relationship, no matter how close, can benefit a person on that day. God says:

People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way. God's promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you, nor let the Deceiver delude you about God. (31:33)

and in another verse:

the day when a man will flee from his brother, and from his mother and his father, and his wife and his children: each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day- (80:34-37)

The accuracy of expression and the precise differences between the 48th

and the 123rd verses of 'The Cow' highlights one miraculous aspect of the Holy Quran. This speech is beyond the ability of humans. Let's look at another example in the following two verse:

God says:

and do not kill your children out of poverty We provide for you and them (06:151)

And in another verse:

And do not kill your children fearing poverty, We provide for them and you (17:31)

Some scholars say that the difference of pronouns, ‘we will provide you’ in the first verse and ‘we will provide them’ in the second, indicates elegance of style. But this is not the case. Let's take a closer look.

In the first verse: ‘**and do not kill your children out of poverty**’ means that poverty already exists. A poor family does not want children, and may take the news of pregnancy as a disaster. When parents are poor, they can hardly feed themselves, let alone a newborn. God answers: ‘**We provide for you and them**’ addressing the pressing issue of the parents first, and then assuring them that the provision of the coming baby will arrive with him or her.

In the second verse ‘**And do not kill your children fearing poverty**’ means that the parents are not suffering from poverty, but they are managing with their income. They may fear that the expenses of a new child will push them into poverty. In this case God answers: **‘We provide for them and for you’** addressing the parent's worry and assuring them that the newborn's bounty will come with him or her, and will not affect your own situation at all.

Verse 49

Remember when We saved you from

Pharaoh’s people, who subjected you to terrible torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women- this was a great trial from your Lord- (Chapter 2: Verse 49)

In this and in the upcoming verses, God makes reference to His numerous favors upon the children of Israel, especially the tremendous bounty of saving them from Pharaoh and his people. Let's look at another verse, very similar to this one, in chapter 7 of the Holy Quran. God says:

Remember how We saved you from Pharaoh’s people, who were subjecting you to the worst of sufferings, killing your sons, sparing only your women- that was a great trial from your Lord. (07:141)

As you may have noted, there are minor differences between the two verses; there are even more intricate differences in the Arabic origin. Each of these differences carry a significant meaning. Let's look at one of these differences: The verb "saved you" is translated from the Arabic verb ‘najjayna’ in the first verse, and from the verb ‘anjayna’ in the second verse. Both convey different meanings. 'Najjayna' means to protect from harm at the time of the torment, while 'Anjayna' suggests the total end of torment. Allah protected the children of Israel when the calamity befell them, and also saved them by drowning Pharaoh and his army ending all torments.

God mentioned that He saved them from Pharaoh and from the slaughtering of their sons, but this was not the only hardship they suffered. The verse says **‘who were subjecting you to the worst of sufferings**’ the word '**worst**' indicates that there were other types of torment. Pharaoh had subjected the children of Israel to a terrible treatment such as lashing, mocking and forced labor. He made all aspects of the Israelites' life miserable. They were burdened with heavy taxes imposed on the unemployed forcing all to work. Some of the Jews walked the streets in old torn clothes pretending of poverty and humility to be relieved from paying the heavy taxes as the following verse points out:

Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness (02:61)

Keep in mind that God does not remind you of every bounty, He only reminds you of the biggest and most important ones. Thus, while Allah saved the Israelites from all kinds of abuse and hardship under the rule of the Pharaohs, He only reminds them in the Quran that He saved their sons from being slaughtered and their women from being enslaved.

Here we should take time to highlight the historic accuracy of the Quran. The title Pharaoh, referring to Egypt's rules, appeared in the Quran during the mention of ancient civilizations. God says:

Have you not seen how your Lord did with the people of A'ad? With the city of Iram of the lofty pillars? The likes of which has not been created in all the land? And Thamood, who hewed out the rocks of the valley? and Pharaoh, he of the tent-pegs? They were tyrants in the land and made much corruption therein. (89:6-12)

Here, the civilization of the Pharaohs and the ancient Egyptians was linked to those of A'ad and Thamood. Then came the story of Prophet Joseph, which happened after the period of A'ad and Thamood. In the story of Joseph, the Quran referred to the Egyptian ruler as a king, not a Pharaoh. God says:

The king said, 'Bring him to me,' but when the messenger came to fetch Joseph, he said, 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands- my Lord knows all about their cunning.' (12:50)

Then we come across the story of Prophet Moses, which occurred many years after Prophet Joseph (peace be upon them). Here we see the title Pharaoh mentioned again. So the Egyptian rulers were given the title Pharaoh before the time of Joseph and again after his death, but the title king during Joseph's time. This corresponds perfectly with what we now know about the Egyptian dynasties. The Hyksos, who were not Egyptian, came to rule Egypt shortly before the time of Prophet Joseph. They assailed into Egypt, defeated the Pharaohs, and ruled for years until the Pharaohs got their act together and kicked them out.

These historical facts were not known until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. The stone that helped decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs and opened the historical records. We learned that the Hyksos were king shepherds who colonized Egypt for a period of time. The Quran accurately related historical events and described the rulers of Egypt with their proper title,

whether Pharaohs or kings. The Rosetta Stone was discovered in 1799, but the Quran had correctly chronicled the history eleven centuries prior. It is one of the many miracles within the Quran which was discovered lately by scientists.

This brings us back to the verse, why was there a mention of '**slaughtering your sons**' in one verse and '**killing your sons**' in the other? Slaughtering is not the same as killing as it requires bloodshed. killing can be done by drowning, strangling, hanging and so on.

God wants us to realize that Pharaoh took retribution from the children of Israel twice. When the Egyptians returned to rule, they killed many Israelites because they were allies of the Hyksos and supported their rule. In fact, the Hyksos King appointed Prophet Joseph, who was from the children of Israel, as the minister. Thus, when the Pharaohs re-conquered Egypt, they took revenge by killing the Israelites and burning their homes.

Slaughtering is related to another incident. One night, Pharaoh saw a dream that a fire came from Jerusalem and burnt the houses of the Egyptians while sparing those of the Children of Israel. When he woke up, he gathered his astrologers and sorcerers who told him that the dream meant that his reign would perish at the hands of a child born to one of the Israelites. So Pharaoh, fearing for his rule, decided to slaughter all the baby boys of the Israelites. Slaughtering was the method of choice for Pharaoh he wanted to assure the death of each and every boy. He was later advised that if continues to kill all the baby boys, He will soon run out of strong slave laborers to do the work. Hence, Pharaoh proclaimed that every other year all the baby boys of the Children of Israel would be slaughtered. Prophet Aaron was born in the year when boys were spared, while Moses came to the world in the year when boys were slaughtered. God, however, had a different plan for him.

These verse continues **'and sparing only your women'** Note that Allah did not say 'sparing your girls', or 'sparing your daughters,' Why? It is because Pharaoh kept women alive for indecent acts and enjoyment. This was an especially severe punishment for the Israelites to endure. God says: '**this was a great trial from your Lord**'. Most of us associate the word 'trial' with hardship or evil. But in fact, the word 'trial' includes both good and evil as the following verse illustrates:

Every self shall taste death. We test you with both evil and good as a trial. And you will be returned to Us. (21:35)

A test, or trial, in by itself is not frightening, but the consequences of that

test maybe. If you do well when tested, you will earn success and you will have nothing to worry about. If, on the other hand, you fail, then the consequences maybe unpleasant. God says:

When Abraham’s Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, ‘I will make you a leader of people.’ Abraham asked, ‘And will You make leaders from my descendants too?’ God answered, ‘My pledge does not hold for those who do evil.’ (02:124)

The children of Israel were tested in two ways: first with great evil of Pharaoh's actions of killing and slaughtering their sons, while sparing women. Second, they were tested with good by being saved from Pharaoh and his army. They succeeded in their first test through patience and prayer. Thus, God supported them with two Prophets, Moses and Aaron. In the second test, after being saved from Pharaoh, they committed acts which we will discuss soon.

Verse 50

and when We parted the sea for you, so saving you and drowning Pharaoh’s people right before your eyes (Chapter 2:Verse 50)

Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) lead hundreds of thousands of his people out of Egypt to escape the grave injustice they experienced under the rule of Pharaoh. Pharaoh soon found out, gathered his army, numbering around a million, and set out after them. When the Israelites saw the army, the following conversation took place between them and prophet Moses:

and they replied, 'We were being persecuted long before you came to us, and since then too.' He said, 'Your Lord may well destroy your enemy and make you successors to the land to see how you behave.' (07:129)

As the number of soldiers chasing them became apparent, they added '**we are sure to be overtaken**.' This was a very logical statement: the sea was before them, and the army of Pharaoh was quickly closing in. But Moses understood God's infinite ability; he appealed to Allah, and then answered his people: '**No, my Lord is with me: He will guide me'**. At that moment, events took a turn beyond the scope of causes and logic, and into the realm of the One who creates causes and logic. God inspired Moses as the following verse illustrates:

So We revealed to Moses, 'Strike the sea with your staff.' And it split in two, each part like a towering cliff. (26:63)

The sea parted, leaving a passage free of water. Through God's command, water went against its flowing nature, and its particles became firm clinging to each other. The result was gigantic mountains with a passages in the middle for the children of Israel to cross. Some question: if the sea split into two parts then, wouldn't the ground revealed be too wet and muddy to cross. We find the answer in the following verse:

We revealed to Moses, 'Go out at night with My servants and strike a dry path for them across the sea. Have no fear of being overtaken and do not be dismayed.' (20:77)

As Moses and his people were crossing the sea, they asked him about the rest of their families. He assured them that everyone was crossing the sea through paths parallel to ours. They said: we want see. Moses raised his hands and supplicated: Lord! Help me face the bad traits of my people. God inspired Moses to strike the barriers with his staff, so crossways would open up between the passages and everyone can see each other.

When Moses saw Pharaoh and his people approaching the shore to cross, he wanted to strike the sea again so it would return to its flowing nature, but God revealed to him:

And leave the sea as it is; indeed that army will be drowned (44:24)

Allah wanted to leave the sea undisturbed so Pharaoh and his forces will be lured into pursuit. As the first of them were getting close to Moses' shore, and the last of them were entering on the other end, God returned the water to its natural state. This was a double blessing for the children

of Israel: first, Allah saved them, and then He destroyed their enemies. It was a miracle that used the same element of water both for protection and for destruction.

This is something we often overlook in our daily life. Most of us only look at gain as the a bounty from God. Very few see the great bounty and wisdom behind prevention and protection. For example, Allah may grant you a way to earn money, but you might end up spending it on your sick child or to repair damage to your house. A much greater grant is when Allah guards you against sickness and loss in the first place.

The verse continues ' **so saving you and drowning Pharaoh's people**.' Note that God did not talk about Pharaoh drowning, rather He talked about Pharaoh's people. Why? Because they were the ones who supported him in his oppression and tyranny. They were the tools Pharaoh used to torture the children of Israel. Without his supporters, Pharaoh would have no power.

The last part of the verse states: '**right before your eyes**.' God wanted the Israelites to watch the Egyptians who wronged them drown. When a person sees his enemy dying, he feels the bitterness in his heart melt away. God gave them peace of mind as they had no doubt nor fear about any possibility that Pharaoh's men may ever come after them again. '**right before your eyes**' May also refer to the Israelites looking at each other in disbelief about being saved from a great trial.

Let's move on to the next verse: God says:

verse 51

And we appointed forty nights for Moses and then, while he was away, you took to worshipping the calf- while you

were wrongdoers. (Chapter 2: Verse 51)

After the exodus from Egypt, God summoned Moses to mount Sinai for forty days and nights so that his nation, which had now achieved independence, could be taught law and morality. Moses' prior communication with God granted him prophethood and declared him the savior of his people from Pharaoh's terrible rule. At that time, God provided Moses with signs and miracles to convince the Egyptians of his prophethood, but Moses was not granted the divine revelation of the Torah. Allah revealed the scripture to Moses soon after the destruction of the Egyptians and the escape of the Israelites. God says:

We appointed thirty nights for Moses, then added ten more: the term set by his Lord was completed in forty nights. Moses said to his brother Aaron, 'Take my place among my people: act rightly and do not follow the way of those who spread corruption.' (07:142)

It is interesting to note that most religious times and events are related in terms of nights. This is because dates and months cannot be calculated accurately with the sun. We cannot know which part of the month we are in by looking at the sun. On the contrary, the shape of the moon gives us plenty of information about time. You and I may be able to roughly approximate the date by looking at the moon, but a Bedouin living in the dessert can tell you exactly which night of the month we are in.

Thus, all religious obligations and calculations are based on the entrance of night. For example, the first night of Ramadan starts at sunset before the first day of actual fasting. The same is true for the 15th night of the month of Sha'ban and so on. In Islamic obligations the night always precedes the day. The only exception is the day of Arafah. We do not call the preceding night the night of Arafah.

The number of months in a year in the sight of Allah is 12 as the following verse illustrates:

God decrees that there are twelve months- ordained in God's Book on the Day when He created the heavens and earth- four months of which are sacred: this is the correct calculation. (9:36)

The Hijri (or Islamic) calendar is lunar, and thus, it is different from the Gregorian calendar which is solar. The wisdom behind the Hijri calendar is that if months were measured by the sun, then Ramadan -for example- would occur at the same time and season every year. In some parts of the

world, Muslims would have to fast in the summer each and every year, while for others Ramadan will occur in winter all the time. With the Hijri calendar Muslims can enjoy fasting and other religious duties in different seasons. This is because the lunar calendar lags behind the solar one by eleven days each year, so with the passage of a few years, events linked to the moon occur at different seasons. This is how God's mercy spreads to all creations.

We explained why most religious obligations are assigned nights and lunar months. Now, we continue with the verse:

‘**while he was away, you took to worshipping the calf- a terrible wrong**.'

God put the Israelites to a test right after they experienced a great miracle and blessing from Him. He says:

We took the Children of Israel across the sea, but when they came upon a people who worshipped idols, they said, ‘Moses, make a god for us like theirs.’ ‘You are ignorant people' he replied (07:138)

This incident took place soon after the deliverance of the children of Israel from the tyrannies of Pharaoh and his men. Moses went for his appointed time with God, leaving Aaron as his deputy.

Here we should stop and ponder a very important point. When the Israelites worked for and served Egyptian women, they used to steel some jewelry and gold from them. Even though the Egyptians were very abusive, and transgressed greatly against God, this does not justify stealing their possessions. We, as believers, should never pay back those who disobeyed God and wronged us, by disobeying God and wronging them. If we did so, then we all would be equal in sin and transgression. Take the example of the person who insulted Abu ad-Darda, a great companion of the Prophet. Upon finding out, Abu ad-Darda wrote to him and said: my brother, do not exaggerate in cursing and insulting me, and leave space for reconciliation; as I do not reward the one who disobeys God in my regard, except by obeying God in regards to him. The Israelites stole jewelry from Egyptian women, thus God made this same jewelry a mean of testing them.

Satan had tempted the Israelites to forsake the worship of God. And a person named Samiri melted their gold and jewelry and turned it into a hollow golden calf which made a peculiar sound when the wind passed

through it. Samiri convinced them that the calf is their god and the god of Moses. The gold from which the calf was made came from theft and unlawful means as the following verse illustrates:

They said: "We did not break our promise to you of our own accord (with intent), but we were loaded with sinful loads of ornaments of the people, and we threw them in the same way as the Samiri threw"(20:87)

You and I should learn a very important lesson from this historical event: things attained unlawfully always prove to be evil for their owner and bring on bad consequences. Nowadays, people often refer to this as karma.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "God is Good and Pure and He only accepts that which is good and pure. Allah has commanded the believers with what He commanded His Messengers, He said, **"O Messengers! eat things good and pure,and do righteous deeds'.** and He said **"You who believe, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship'.** Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave the example of a man, so tired from long travel, that his hair became messed up and his clothes tattered and covered with dust. He raised his hand towards the heavens and prayed, 'O my Lord. O my Lord help me,' while his food is from unlawful means, his drink is from unlawful means, his clothes are from unlawful means and he lives from unlawful means. How can his prayers and pleas ever be accepted?"

This is what happened to the Israelites. They stole from the Egyptians and earned harm for themselves. God said describing them: '**you took to worshipping the calf- while you were wrongdoers.**

Verse 52

Then We pardoned you after that so

that perhaps you would be grateful (Chapter 2: Verse 52)

God showers the Children of Israel with mercy even after they committed the gravest of sins. He forgave them so all of us may know that our Lord is all-Merciful. He opens the doors of repentance one after the other to wash away the evil deeds of humanity.

When you sin, you temporarily depart the domain of faith. If repentance and pardoning were not legislated, then people would have despaired and continually sinned thinking that after their first sin, they were destined to hellfire. Allah wants good for all His creation, and wants to bring everyone back into the fold of faith. He says:

Say, 'My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful. (39:53)

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad said: "God is happier with the repentance of His servant than one of you finding your horse after it had strayed away in the middle of the desert."

This narration illustrates a traveling man with all his possessions, be it wealth, food and water, packed on the back of his animal. In the midst of a barren desert, the horse gets away from him. He looks for it for days to no avail. Not only he has lost the horse, but he lost all the necessities for survival. Suddenly, he turns around and finds it standing before him. Imagine the amount of happiness, joy and relief this man feels. This pales when compared with God's happiness when you repent to him and seek forgiveness for your sins.

Allah opens the doors of repentance because He wants life in this world to move on. In fact, quite often the best of deeds and charities come from those who have sinned and transgressed. God says:

Establish prayer at each end of the day and in the first part of the night. Good actions eradicate bad actions. This is a reminder for people who pay heed. (11:114)

and in another verse:

Take alms out of their wealth so that you may thereby cleanse them and cause them to grow in purity and sincerity, and pray for them.

Indeed your prayer is a source of comfort for them. God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (9:103)

God forgave the Israelites after their blatant sin because He wants to allow good to prevail in the universe. Moreover, Allah gave them a great chance to reform all aspects of life by revealing the Torah; which brings us to the next verse of the Cow. God says:

Verse 53

Remember when We gave Moses the Scripture, and the means to distinguish right and wrong, so that you might be guided. (Chapter 2: Verse 53)

After witnessing one of the greatest miracles in parting the sea and the drowning of Pharaoh and his army, the Israelites should have had unshakable faith free of any doubt. Did witnessing these great events remove the disbelief and hypocrisy from their hearts? Sadly, the answer is no, they remained stubborn throughout.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) cautioned all of us from becoming hardened like the children of Israel. When you make things difficult for yourself, God in return makes things difficult for you. Take the example of the incident of the cow, which the current chapter is named after. A murder had occurred, and it almost stirred up war between two tribes of the Israelites. God ordered the sacrifice of a cow in order to solve this murder case. Rather than simply carrying out God's command, the villagers kept delaying, and asking unnecessary questions such the type of the cow, its color and so on. If they would have sacrificed any random cow, it would have been sufficient. They made it difficult for Prophet

Moses, so in return, God made things difficult for them.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said to his companions: "Leave me as long as I let you be, for the people who were before you were ruined because of their questions and quarrels with their Prophets. So, if I order you to do something, then do it as much as you can, and if I forbid you from something then just leave it."

The scripture and the means to distinguish right from wrong were great blessings for the children of Israel to cherish and remember. You should always welcome divine obligation and commandments with an open heart. Do not consider faith and obligation as restrictions on your freedom. Quite the contrary: divine law and order is the ultimate freedom. Take the example of theft. When Allah made theft unlawful for you, He did not restrict your freedom, rather he protected you. Because He commanded everyone else not to steal from you. Similarly, when He commanded you against committing adultery, He also commanded everyone else to keep away from your family. This is a great protection for the entire humanity. Thus, the Torah was a great gift for the Children of Israel to free them from all society's ills. It detailed the heavenly law and doctrine. God also gave them guidance to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Verse 54

And when Moses said to his people, "O my people, indeed you have wronged yourselves by your taking of the calf. So repent to your Creator and kill yourselves. That is best for you in the sight of your Creator." Then He

accepted your repentance; indeed, He is the All forgiving, the most merciful. (Chapter 2: Verse 54)

The sin committed by the Israelites in Moses' absence was very grave. They took a gold calf as an idol. This is while Moses was receiving Torah and the commandments of his Lord. God informed Moses that his people have been misled and began the worship of an idol. Moses was grief-stricken; He returned full of rage and seized his brother Aaron by his beard and hair. Moses yelled: didn't I appoint you as my deputy? How could you let them go astray? Aaron replied:

He said, 'Son of my mother- let go of my beard and my hair!- I was afraid you would say, "You have caused division among the children of Israel and have not heeded what I said."' (20:94)

The truth is that the Samiri was the one who misled them and called them to the worship of the golden calf. He took advantage of the fact that the Israelites were already asking Moses for an Idol, or a physical manifestation of God. He convinced them that this calf, which made a very loud noise, was their Lord and the Lord of Moses.

How can God allow such things to happen, you may ask? Don't be surprised by the fact that events may run in the favor of evil and corruption for a while. God allows this to happen in order to test his servants. Truth and justice are heavy burdens that need men and women of strong and true character to carry and fight for them. These men and women are sculpted and finessed by tests and trials. Take the example of the believers who suffered immensely in the early days of Islam, only to carry its message to all corners of the world few years later. Before the Prophet's migration to Medina, he and his followers suffered at the hands of the disbelievers. After being abused, ridiculed and sanctioned by Quraysh, He (peace be upon him) went to the tribe of Taif to invite them to Islam, and in the hopes of getting some support. He was confronted with refusal and mockery. The town even set their young boys to chase him away with stones that left the Prophet's heels soaked with blood. After which he raised his hands towards the sky and made the heartfelt supplication to his Lord: "O God! I appeal to you for I am weak, short on power, and for the mistreatment, contempt and disregard I received from

my people." It was at that time, and after all these tests and trial, that Allah honored the prophet with the night journey and the ascension to the heavens.

The early followers of Islam were also subjected to abuse and persecution. These trials prepared them to carry the new faith with love and tolerance over hardship. Allah trains them to become patient over afflictions, powerful before their opponents, and able to handle difficulties with grace. This is the way true faith is built and measured.

It is in sharp contrast to man-made governing systems that are often designed to benefit the few and the elite. Members of the central committees of the communist parties are rich, while the whole population suffers wearing cheap attire and living in small houses. Capitalists prey on the weak and exploit natural resources with no regard for future generations. So is the case with every cause for falsehood. The cause for good is exactly the opposite. The preacher of truth is often the first to sacrifice, and often the one who suffers the most. He or she is rarely around to reap the benefits of the truth. You can reliably use this fact to spot good and evil causes. Any movement or mission that grants plenty of wealth and influence to its leaders early on is built on a false cause.

This brings us back to the verse. Prophet Moses is reprimanding his people for failing their test and committing the worst possible deviation from the path of monotheism to the calf-worshipping. He said '**"O my people, indeed you have wronged yourselves by your taking of the calf.'** The natural question to ask here is: Did those who worshiped the calf wrong themselves or did they wrong God? The answer is simple……They were unjust towards themselves because they brought themselves destruction without gaining any benefit. God says:

When Luqman said to his son, as he advised him: 'O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice.' (3:13)

God described associating partners to him as a great injustice. This is because when you regard someone or something, that did not create, nor provided, nor nourished as an equivalent to Allah who creates, provides and nourishes, you would be unfair. Worship is the obedience of the servant towards his or her Lord. Did the gold calf provide the Israelites with anything? Did it create it anything, or was it created by the Samiri? Taking the calf for worship is one of the greatest injustices one can commit. This act, however, affects the person committing it, and does not affect God. Whether you believe in Allah or you do not, He will remain

the All-Powerful, the All-Competent and the Distinguished. Your faith or disbelief in Him will not decrease anything in His kingdom. Your beliefs and actions will only reflect on you.

You can enjoy a few days, weeks or even years devouring other people's rights. You can take full advantage of God's bounties without any gratitude. Eventually you will die and face the consequences of your actions. God says:

It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves. (02:57)

God accepts the repentance of a person who seeks forgiveness from sin and who is determined not to repeat the same mistake. Repentance is actually the basis of forgiveness. Allah could have seized and destroyed the Children of Israel as He did with the previous nations when they indulged in grave sins. But His mercy encompassed them and they were given another chance.

He said ' **So repent to your Creator.'** God's names 'al-Khaliq and 'al-Bari' are usually translated into the same English name 'the Creator.' In the Arabic language, however, they carry two distinct meanings. Al-Khaliq is the one who creates from nothing, while al-Bari is the one who fashions and shapes in perfect proportions. Creating and proportioning are different as Allah highlights in the following verses:

Glorify the name of your Lord the Most High, who created in due proportion; He who determined and guided (87:1-3)

In the verse under discussion, God asked the Israelites to repent to Him 'Al-Bari,' the one who perfected their creation. The Israelites disbelieved in the one who perfected them, and they worshiped a gold calf. So the command came **'repent to your Creator and kill yourselves.'** In essence, they were asked to return the life and creation they were given to the One who granted it to them in the first place. By repeatedly abusing the gift of life and wasting the grant of guidance, they lost the privilege of life.

After the command was issued, the Israelites lined up, and the ones who had not worshipped the calf were commissioned to kill the calf-worshippers. It was extremely difficult for them, as many were asked to kill their own relatives and friends. God sent down heavy fog all around them to make this terrible task easier. Prophets Moses and Aaron advised their people to weep and plead before God perhaps He will pardon them.

The verse continues: '**That is best for you in the sight of your Creator.'**

Death was prescribed in this situation as a way to wipe out their sin. God ordered this form of repentance as it expressed sincere remorse, and provided protection from punishment in the hereafter. Allah wants the best for his creation, and while this command was extreme in the sight of the Israelites, it did save them from punishment in hellfire. In the sight of God, being saved from hellfire and then being admitted into paradise is the true success. By obeying His command, the calf-worshipper brought back true piety to their soul that rebelled against God and earned it everlasting forgiveness and permanent life in paradise. God says: **He accepted your repentance; indeed, He is the All forgiving, the most merciful.**

Now we move to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

Verse 55

And when you said, ‘Moses, we will not believe in you until we see Allah with our own eyes.’ So the thunder-bolt struck you dead while you were looking. (Chapter 2: Verse 55)

In the past few verses, detailing the actions of the Children of Israel, we are presented with valuable lessons. Allah is inviting us to study the actions of those who were granted scriptures and heavenly guidance. How did they act? What were the results of the choices they made? The answers to these questions apply to all humanity, and to all heavenly messages. With great gifts, comes great responsibility and accountability. Will we learn from these lessons? or are we bound to ignore them and fall into the same traps?

The current verse illustrates how the Israelites squandered one gift after another. They continued their quest for what is physical and tangible, and disregarded spirituality and faith even after being pardoned for worshipping the golden calf. They said: **'Moses, we will not believe in you until we see Allah with our own eyes.'** This request shows true ignorance about the majesty and grandeur of Allah. He says:

Eyesight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all eyesight. He is the All-Subtle, the All-Aware. (06:103)

Allah's being is beyond human comprehension. In fact there are many matters that are beyond our comprehension. Those who are focused on materialistic things….who only believe in what is physical and tangible have a very hard time understanding this issue. Allah brings it to our attention in the following verses:

On earth there are signs for those with sure faith—And within yourselves. Can you not perceive? (51:21,22)

God placed within each one of us the highest level of evidence of that which cannot be seen, touched or physically measured. It is the soul. Human bodies are objects that require the presence of a soul to bring them to life. Modern science and medicine understand that life and movement are not only the result of a proper physical form. Rather there is something else that is needed to produce life. The human soul cannot be seen, touched, measured, or felt. We know it is there by its effects. When the soul is taken, life ends and the body -regardless of its condition- becomes still.

If you cannot see or comprehend the soul that resides within your own body, then how do you demand to see God? If you cannot see the creation within you, how can you see the creator? Allah says:

They ask you about the Soul. Say, 'The Soul is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge. (17:85)

Let's take a moment to examine the expression: '**until we see Allah with our own eyes**'. The verb 'see' can be used to refer to knowledge, rather than physical sight. For example:

Have you seen him who has taken his whims and desires to be his god? Will you then be his guardian? (25:43)

Meaning, did you know about? Or Are you aware? …In another example, when a teacher explains a mathematical concept to you, you

might say 'I see', meaning 'I understand.' But when the verse added '**with our own eyes,'** it negated the Israelites asking for true knowledge or awareness of Allah, rather, their request was for the physical observation of God. Again, this request shows the lack of faith, and a life totally based on materialism.

The Israelite's unjust demand to see God stems from their lack of understanding of all the evidence that was available to them regarding the Lord. Let's look at the facts they had at the time. God Almighty says:

When Moses came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!' He said, 'You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me,' and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, 'Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!' (07:143)

The issue of seeing God in this world has been absolutely settled: There is no way to see God while we exist in our current form. The human body is governed by certain laws in this world, and by a different set of laws in the hereafter. For example, in this world, the human body discharges waste and impurities, while in the hereafter the body will be pure producing no waste. We are now bound by age and time, but in the hereafter, youth will be forever. Thus, there is a clear difference between the two which brings us back to the verse. In this world, one cannot see God. But, in the hereafter, the greatest bounty granted to the believers is the ability to see Allah. He says:

On that Day there will be radiant faces, looking at their Lord (75:22-23)

How could this be, you may ask? Humans have invented tools such as the microscope to observe what we could not see with the naked eye. Similarly, nowadays, an eye specialist is able to treat the eyes of a patient so that he or she will not require the use of glasses or contacts again. If man was able to invent tools that made it possible to see what he could not see before, then imagine the power of God to transform our abilities in the hereafter so that we may enjoy our Lord's company.

God had proved this issue to Moses. The mountain, despite its size and strength, was unable to bear the light of God. Moses (peace be upon him) could not handle the sight of the mountain being affected by God's light. It was as if God wanted to explain to Moses that he was deprived of

seeing the Lord out of mercy for him. After all, if the mountain crumbled at the sight of God's light, then imagine what would have happened to Moses.

Verse 56

Then We revived you after your death, so that you might be thankful. (Chapter 2: Verse 56)

We continue with the story of the Children of Israel who demanded to see the Lord with their own eyes. If you recall, Prophet Moses was also struck by the thunderbolt when he asked God to make Himself visible to him. But there is a difference between the two incidents. Let's examine. God says:

When Moses came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!' He said, 'You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me,' and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, 'Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!' (07:143)

The case of the Israelites was different. Moses wanted to see Allah out of shear love and longing to be with his creator. As we discussed earlier, the human form in this world cannot see God. Moses became unconscious, and he later regained consciousness. As for Moses' people, they asked to see Allah out of defiance and disbelief. They also were struck by thunderbolt, and actually died. God later resurrected them so perhaps they would be thankful.

We now move to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 57

We made the clouds cover you with shade, and sent manna and quails down to you, saying, ‘Eat the good things We have provided for you.’ It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves. (Chapter 2: Verse 57)

This verse illustrates more of the great favors God showered the Israelites with when they were wandering in the desert under the scorching sun. Allah provided food and sustenance. Manna is a sweet exudate which appears on tree leaves in the shape of red drops at daybreak. It can still be found today in some regions of Iraq. The Israelites used to gather it in the early morning by spreading white sheets under the trees and shaking the branches to collect the delicious dessert. It was easy to digest, providing energy and strength for life in the desert. Quail is a type of fatty bird. This bird approached the Israelites in flocks, and remained around making it an easy catch. It was a great source of protein and nourishment.

Perhaps the harshest element to deal with in the desert is the heat of the sun. Allah provided cloud cover as protection against the sun's rays. All of these blessings came directly from the heavens with minimal need for work or effort. Thus, this kind of sustenance required faith and trust in the provider. This is kind of trust is difficult for those who were materialistic. What if they woke up one day to find no manna? What if the flocks of quail stopped coming? True believers would have thought

differently, and would have had faith that that One who provided manna and quail will not let down or let them starve.

God answers this doubt and ingratitude with the phrase: '**It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves.**' It is the third time Allah had mentioned that the people of Moses wronged themselves. In the 51st verse of 'The Cow' God says: '**you took to worshipping the calf- while you were wrongdoers;'** in the 54th verse He says: '**indeed you have wronged yourselves**' and in this verse '**It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves.**'

We have already discussed that no one has the ability to wrong God because He is the ever-living, the all-powerful with His ability, wisdom, and grandeur. These attributes will not be affected whatsoever if you believe in God and follow His teachings, or if you choose to go the other way. Rather, it is you who will face the consequences of your choices and actions. In your hand right now is the key for your own success and salvation.

We live in a world where everything is subjected to change. The blessings that you enjoy will either depart you over time, or you may depart them when you die. The only lasting elements are your words and your actions. Thus, if you disobey God and rebel against His teaching, you would have certainly wronged yourself and did it harm. The joys of this world will end, and only the consequences of your actions will remain.

Verse 58

Remember when We said, 'Enter this town. and eat from it wherever you like, freely. Enter the gate prostrating and say, "Relieve us!" Then We shall forgive

you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good.' (Chapter 2: verse 58)

The Israelites were blessed with great heavenly bounties. Manna and quail were quality foods available in abundance. They were sweet, pure and delicious; more importantly, they came easily in large amounts without the need for any effort or planning. However, this made the Children of Israel uncomfortable. They approached Moses requesting that he asks God to allow them to grow vegetation with their own hands.....something they would be able to see grow right in front of them. They were in constant worry about the possibility of waking up one day to find no manna nor quail. Despite being blessed with one miracle after another, the Israelites could not bring themselves to have proper faith in the Lord. God completes the story in the following verse:

Remember when you said, 'Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness, and they incurred the wrath of God because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers. (02:61)

God continuously granted bounties to the Israelites, but they often received them with doubt and ungratefulness. He saved them from tyranny, parted the sea, and drowned Pharaoh along with all his troops, cavalry, and weapons right in front of their eyes. They worshiped the gold calf shortly after.......Yet, Allah showered them with forgiveness and granted them the Torah. He also brought them back to life after they unjustly demanded to physically see Him and were struck dead by a thunderbolt. During their journey under the scorching desert sun, God provided constant shade with cloud cover. They had no worries about daily food and nourishment as manna -a sweet exudate of certain plants- and quail -a fatty bird- were provided for them. In spite of God's generosity, they demanded to grow lower quality foods for themselves. God accepted their request and said: '**Enter this town'** referring to the

city of Jerusalem or the present day areas of Jordan and Palestine.

The verse continues: **'and eat from it wherever you like, freely.'** This invitation indicates that there were many varieties of foods available in abundance. It also tells us that the Israelites were invited to eat for pleasure not out of true hunger. When a person is not hungry, different varieties of food are presented in order to temp him or her to eat. When a person is truly hunger, he or she will eat from any food that is around.

The verse continues: '**'Enter the gate prostrating and say, "Relieve us!" Then We shall forgive you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good.'** Here, Allah issued a simple and straight forward command. The Israelites are promised to be granted what they asked for, and they would also be forgiven for their sins and increased in reward if they performed this command properly. Whenever you do good deeds, God always rewards you many folds over. He says:

Those who do good will have the best and more! Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces. They are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, forever. (10:26)

With this golden opportunity of a great reward in exchange for easy work, how did the Children of Israel fare? This brings us to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 59

But the wrongdoers substituted a different word from the one they had been given. So, because they persistently disobeyed, We sent a plague down from the heavens upon the

deviators.(Chapter 2: Verse 59)

Was this blatant disobedience and disregard for God's orders intentional? Or was it because the task was so difficult that they were unable to carry it out as instructed? Did God burden them with too much? we find the answer in the following verse:

Allah does not burden any self, except with something within its capacity: in its favor is whatever good it earns, and against it whatever evil it merits. (02:286)

Let's keep in mind that entering into the town was what the Israelites had asked for. They wanted to live in a valley where they could grow their own food. God granted their request and taught them the spiritual etiquette of showing gratitude for given exactly what they asked. Allah also added the bounty of forgiveness if properly requested. In other words, for performing a single task, the Children of Israel would be granted exactly what they asked for in this world, and the tremendous bonus of mercy and forgiveness for the hereafter.

But some of them intentionally altered God’s command by changing a single letter. God had commanded them to say 'Hita' which means: please unload our sins. Those who were arrogant and defiant said 'Hinta' -which is a form of wheat- as they entered. This was an act of defiance and complete disregard for all the bounties and gifts they have been blessed with. So when you read the last of the verse **'We sent a plague down from the heavens upon the deviators,'** detailing the punishment, you will understand all the terrible actions, defiance, and disregard for the Lord that led to this result.

Verse 60

Remember when Moses prayed for

water for his people and We said to him, 'Strike the rock with your staff.' Twelve springs gushed out, and each group knew its drinking place. 'Eat and drink the sustenance God has provided and do not cause corruption in the land.'(Chapter 2: Verse 60)

God points out one of the most important bounties He gave the Children of Israel. In the desert, water was so scarce that there wasn't enough even to quench the thirst of the Israelites. Drought has different levels. The mildest level is when there is insufficient water for crops and plants; as the severity increases, water may not be enough for livestock. And at the most extreme level of drought, there is a shortage of drinking water for people. Moses (peace be upon him) supplicate God for water. Keep in mind that people usually resort to God in prayer for water only after all their resources have run out. God wants the Israelites to recall that when they were wandering in the desert He provided them shade, and He sent the water gushing out of solid rock when they asked for it.

Let's take a moment here to think about the beauty and precision of creation. Water is the source of life. It comes to us pure and clean through rain so we can drink, water crops and raise livestock. Three quarters of the earth's surface is covered by water, leaving around 1/4th for dry land. God created our planet with accurate proportions to provide a proper surface for evaporation. Take the example of a glass filled with water. If you leave the glass in direct sunlight for days, you may find that a small portion of the water had evaporated. However, if you spill this glass -in essence if you increase the water surface exposed to sunlight,- you will find that all the water evaporates in just an hour or two. Similarly, Allah made the water surface large enough to accelerate the evaporation and rain cycle. He sends rain so you and I can benefit according to our needs, and the rest turns into springs or gets stored in the ground. God says:

Have you not considered that God sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth, and then, with it, brings

forth vegetation of various colours, which later withers, turns yellow before your eyes, and is crumbled to dust at His command? There is truly a reminder in this for those who posses intellect (39:21)

Some people claim that the rain cycle is solely based on fixed scientific laws. As the ocean water evaporates, c*louds form, and when clouds rise to a certain altitude and run into cooler air, the water vapor condenses around dust particles* causing it to rain*. We answer that the science is accurate in accounting for the constants, but who accounts for all the variables. The wind may blow or may not take the clouds where they are needed. Who drives the wind to carry the clouds, who carries the clouds to dry land? Who makes the rain beneficial, or turns it into destructive floods? Who provides us with wells and springs?* God Almighty says:

Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land, and with it produce vegetation from which their cattle and they themselves eat? Do they not see? (32:27)

and in another verse:

Say: "Have you ever considered: If your water should vanish underground, who is there that can bring to you gushing water?"(67:30)

and lastly:

If only they were to go straight on the Path, We would give them abundant water to drink (72:16)

This brings us back to the verse. God says: '**Remember when Moses prayed for water for his people'** which indicates that the Israelites had no refuge except God because they ran out of all sources of drinking water.

When a drought occurs and people use all the available reserves, families -including all members young and old- come out to supplicate God for water. We plead our Lord by means of our infants and elderly, so God may respond to our prayers. Anas (one of the prophet's closest companions) narrated: Whenever we were hit by a drought, Umar bin Al-Khattab used to supplicate: "O Allah! We used to entreat your love for Prophet Muhammad to provide us with rain, and You would bless us with it. Now we entreat your love for the Prophet's uncle Al- Abbas. O Allah ! Bless us with rain." And so it would rain.

A quick note about the narration we just mentioned: Some scholars incorrectly understood that during supplication, we cannot entreat God's

love of a dead Prophet or person. Umar, afterall, mentioned the Prophet's Uncle, not the Prophet himself. They say that it is understood that entreating God's love of the dead is not permissible. The real question to ask here is: Did Umar choose to entreat God's love for Al-Abbas because of Al-Abbas himself, or because he is the uncle of the Prophet? The use of the Prophet's uncle illustrates that entreating Allah's love is essentially for His love for Prophet Muhammad. We also understand that entreating God's love is not confined to the Prophet alone; in fact it can be made by his relatives too.

This raises another question: Why was entreating God's love transferred from the Prophet (peace be upon him) to his uncle? The answer is simple. The Prophet had passed away and would not benefit from the rain, while his uncle who was still living -and thirsty due to the drought- would definitely benefit from it. In essence, Umar was pleading Allah for rain and saying: 'the family of your beloved Prophet Muhammad is thirsty….Dear Lord please give them water to drink, and give us some too'. Thus, the narration supports that entreating Allah's love for the Prophet, and His love for the Prophet's family is an acceptable way of supplication.

From the previous few verses, we came to learn that the Israelites often returned God’s favors with rejection and denial. Why would Allah grant them water after all they did? We answer that it was to honor the compassionate mercy of prophet Moses. Moses had unlimited faith in God's mercy, and he continuously supplicated for the benefit of his people.

When you read this verse, you may notice that it eliminates certain information and leaves it up to you to understand. For example, the beginning of the verse mentions **Remember when Moses prayed for water for his people and We said to him, ‘Strike the rock with your staff.’** The verse does not mention the actual supplication of Moses ‘O Lord provide them with water,’ and it does not mention that God accepted and responded to his prayer because all that is understood form the context. The Quran often gives the reader the essential information, while leaving out the rest so it can be understood by the attentive mind. Let's look at an example from Chapter 27 'The Ants'. Allah narrates the story of the hoopoe; a bird who flew to the land of Sheba and saw the Queen and her people worshipping the sun. He returned and reported to Prophet Solomon. Solomon gave him a letter to deliver to the Queen inviting her to faith and to believe in God as the following verses

illustrates:

Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then withdraw and see what answer they send back.' She said, 'Council! a noble letter has been delivered to me (27:28-29)

When you listen to the verses, you realize that some information has been omitted, but it is understood from the context. The verses did not mention that the hoopoe flew to Sheba after being commanded to deliver the letter. You understand that after receiving the letter, the Queen opened it, read it and called her cabinet to a meeting. Allah wants you to read the Quran with your intellect, and be mindful of its message. He does not want you to glance it over, or read while your mind is distracted. He says:

Why do they not study the Qur'an? If it was the words of other than God, they would have found many contradiction in it. (4:82)

God could have provided the Israelites with water simply through rain, but He wanted them to see another miracle. He commanded Moses to strike a rock with his staff after which water gushed out. Striking a rock with a wood staff usually breaks the staff, and won't even make a chip in the rock. It was through God's simple command "be" that the opposite took place and springs flowed from solid rock. Allah blessed the Children of Israel with double blessing -a miracle to witness and water to drink- so it may increase faith in their hearts.

Here we come across another example where materialism was the overriding manner in which the Children of Israel saw the world. They said to Moses 'what if we get stuck in a place where there is no water, we really should take this rock along with us'. They overlooked the fact that the springs gushed by God's command, not by something inherent in the rock itself.

The verse continues: '**Twelve springs gushed out, and each group knew its drinking place.**' Why did they require twelve springs, you may ask? It was so the Israelites would avoid water disputes. They were divided into twelve tribes with separate, often quarrelling, leaders. Each spring would flow in the direction of one tribe. And once each tribe had quenched their thirst and fulfilled their needs, Moses would strike the rock to stop the water flow.

It is interesting to pause here and think about our human behavior. The verse that states '**and each group knew its drinking place.'** Being thirsty and in need, the Israelites listened and followed God's instruction.

Similarly, when any one of us is in desperate position, he or she usually turns to God and adheres to His teachings. When, on the other hand, the distress is relieved, most people turn back to old habits. Thus, at the end of the verse God advises all of us with the following message: **'Eat and drink the sustenance God has provided and do not cause corruption in the land.'** as a reminder not to turn our backs on God's teachings with ingratitude once his bounties are abundant. Let's look at an example form the Quran of people who received the same advise. God says:

There was also a sign for Saba in their dwelling place: two gardens – one to the right and one to the left. 'Eat of your Lord's provision and give thanks to Him: a bountiful land and a forgiving Lord.' But they paid no heed, so We let loose on them a ?ood from the dam and replaced their two gardens with others that yielded bitter fruit, tamarisk bushes, and a few lote trees. (34:15-16)

Allah showered the people of Sheba with blessings, but they were arrogant and ungrateful. They took pride in a dam they built to gather and store water year-round. They were overconfident in their talents and forgot God was the one who blessed them with knowledge, ability, materials to build the dam, and fertile land. As they continued to transgress, God punished them by letting loose a devastating flood after heavy rains swept away the dam. You and I should always hold deep gratitude for God's gifts and remove any trace of arrogance from the heart. God says:

And when your Lord announced: "If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more, but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is severe."' (14:7)

Verse 61

Remember when you said, 'Moses, we

cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness, and they incurred the wrath of God because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers. (Chapter 2, Verse 61)

While the Israelites were roaming the desert, they had their daily food delivery of manna and quails. They said to Prophet Moses: '**Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food'** The word 'one' is translated from the Arabic word 'Wahed'. Let's take a few moments to study the use of this word. Counting begins with the number 'Wahed' as it is the first number. When you refer to an individual as 'Wahed,' it usually means that he or she is alone, and does not indicate oneness or uniqueness. When, on the other hand, we say that Allah is Wahed - or God is One- it indicates that there is nothing similar to Him.

While, the word 'Wahed' means singularity, it does not mean unity, or indivisibility. In other words, something described as 'Wahed' or 'One' can be made out of many parts and components. That is where the word 'Ahad' comes in. 'Ahad' indicates unity and indivisibility. Let's clarify with an example, A human being cannot be described as 'ahad' because he or she is formed from many parts and organs. A human cannot be described as 'Wahed' because there are many others like him or her.

Planet earth maybe described as 'Wahed,' because it uniquely carries life, but it cannot be described as ‘ahad’ because it is made of many different elements and layers. Only Allah is the 'Wahed and Ahad' because nothing whatsoever is similar to Him, and He is not formed of components. 'Wahed' refers to His uniqueness, while 'Ahad' negates subdivision.

This brings us back to the verse. Why did the Israelites refer to mana and quail as one, although they are clearly two distinct foods? It is because they were referring to the way these foods were delivered. Both mana and Quail descended daily from the sky. The Israelites were worried that this single source of food may one day stop. They wondered: ‘how can we be assured that it will continue to descend? we prefer food that we grow with our own hands.’ Clearly, despite being blessed with one miracle after another, they had issues with matters of faith. They lacked trust in Allah, and preferred the material and the tangible. That was also the reason behind their previous request when they said: **‘Moses, we will not believe in you until we see Allah with our own eyes.’**

In this verse they asked Moses to supplicate God '**to bring out for us some of the earth’s produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.’** Supplication is the act of humbly asking your needs from the one who holds a higher status than you. It is different from asking your need from someone who holds a similar status which is known as request. When you ask someone lower than you for something, then it is classified as command. The Israelites asked Moses to supplicate Allah for the opportunity to grow some of what the earth produces. They were specific in the types of foods they wanted: green herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and onions. These foods were what the Children of Israel used to eat in Egypt when most of them worked as servants and day-laborers under Pharaoh's rule. It appears that they had grown accustomed to living and eating as servants.

God wanted to elevate the status of the Children of Israel, and thus He sent them daily manna and quails -the foods of the upper classes-. But they preferred the common laborer's food such as lettuce, radishes, leaks and so on. Thus, before granting their wish, Allah asked them:"**Would you exchange better for worse?**” meaning are you turning down manna and quail and asking for inferior foods such as onions and lentils? keep in mind that inferior does not mean awful or disgraceful. Everything the earth produces is a bounty and a blessing from Allah. 'Inferior' here is referring to the source of the food. Manna and quails were created and delivered by God’s direct command 'be.' It was a miracle far superior to

the vegetables that had to be grown by means of agriculture. The blessing created through God’s direct command is pure and does not involve any work or effort. Growing vegetables requires plowing, sowing, watering and so on. God says comparing the two:

and do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the flower of this present life: We test them through this, but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting. (20:131)

Allah is describing the provision of this world as a test, and the provision of the hereafter as something far better. In this world, you have to work hard to attain sustenance and material goods. Moreover, you have to restrain yourself from the temptation of earning easy living by dishonest means. In the race of life, many people rush to accumulate wealth unlawfully. Contrast that with provisions of the hereafter, which God describes as far superior, because they are made by Him and provided in abundance for eternity.

This brings us back to the verse. God is asking the Israelites: Would you exchange manna and quail -a provision directly provided by Allah similar to that of the hereafter- with something lesser that you have to work for? The answer came from God ‘**Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.’**

It is perhaps worth noting that the Arabic word for Egypt that is mentioned throughout the Quran is 'Misr', which is the same word we use to this day. However, in this verse God used the word 'Misran' with an added tone at the end. The natural question to ask is: Does 'Misr' in all the other verses and 'Misran' in this verse refer to the same place? It is unlikely. 'Misr' surly refers to the county of Egypt, and because it is a name of a country, cannot be altered linguistically. 'Misran' on the other hand can be used to refer to any place that has proper rule and government.

Humiliation refers to hardship and tragedy that lead to failure and defeat. However, Humiliation can be overcome by seeking the support and protection of someone stronger, someone with the ability to lift hardship and protect from danger. God says:

They will be plunged into abasement wherever they are found, unless they have a treaty with Allah and with the people. They have brought down anger from Allah upon themselves, and they have been plunged into destitution. That was because they rejected

Allah's Signs and killed the Prophets without any right to do so. That was because they disobeyed and went beyond the limits. (03:112)

Take the example of the treaty made between Prophet Muhammad and the Jewish tribes of Medina. They were granted protection and security and spared defeat. This is similar to modern weak countries signing security and trade pacts with the United States to insure protection and avoid humiliation.

The term **'struck with'** is the term we use to describe the process of striking metal coins to imprint them with the markings for money; meaning the mark is visible and everlasting. When God used the phrase **'struck with humiliation,'** it indicates that humiliation has been made visible, public and well known. It all started in Egypt where the children of Israel were forced into slave labor and burdened with very heavy taxes. Even their rich used to walk the streets dressed in wretched torn clothes in order to hide their wealth and avoid taxes.

'and they incurred the wrath of God.' Why did they earn such anger from God? **'because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers'.** Remember that the Israelites were blessed with many prophets to guide them and keep them on the right path. However, often this guidance was exchanged for small worldly gain. God says:

Those are the ones who have purchased error in exchange for guidance, so their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided (2:16)

The real problem went much deeper, because on many occasions things went as far as killing the Prophets.

Let's take a moment here to clarify the difference between prophets and messengers. Allah sent mankind Prophets and Messengers to convey his teaching and to lead by example. A Messenger caries a new heavenly message, teaches it to his people, and practices it among them. A Prophet, on the other hand, serves as a practical example, and a reminder for his people, but he does not carry a new message. Thus, every Messenger is a Prophet, but not every Prophet is a Messenger. For example Messengers Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, Abraham, David (peace be upon them) all brought new messages and new scriptures, they were also prophets because they practiced the new message and lead by

example. Prophets Ismail, Solomon, Lot, John and many others (peace be upon them) were sent to bring people back to the right path and to the scriptures they already had. They were not messenger, because they did not bring new revelations. Allah protects His Prophets and Messengers from sin and mistakes. They are infallible in delivering and practicing God's teachings. And since messengers are the carriers of new revelation, Allah gives them the added protection from being killed.

God sent Prophets for the benefit of the children of Israel, but they killed many of them. Why? Because the Prophets exposed their denial, disobedience and rejection of the scripture. Many Israelites were benefiting from unlawful means, unlawful trade and usury. Many of their scholars abused religion to gain status and misguide people. All this was exposed, and all the worldly benefits were under threat when a new Prophet came to help the people. The children of Israel conspired against and killed some of their Prophets in order to protect their worldly gains, and thus earned God's anger and punishment .

This model continues till today. When you look around, you often see corrupt greedy people -regardless of their declared faith- trying to harm those who are fair and follow God's path. In corrupt societies, the honest person is often viewed as an obstacle that needs to be removed.

Verse 62

Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeians —those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously— they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they

grieve. (Chapter 2: Verse 62)

In the previous verses, God presented us the case of the Israelites, who through lack of faith and through repeated wrongful deeds had earned God's anger and punishment. Every person is judged by his or her own faith and deeds. In this verse, Allah reveals that the nations who lived before the time of Prophet Muhammad, who had true faith, and practiced it through good deeds are guaranteed their reward on the day of judgment. This verse is very similar to verse 69 of Surat Al-Maida, (chapter 5 of the Quran), with a slight difference in the arrangement of words. God says:

Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Sabeians, and the Christians — those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously— they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

Again we find a similar verse in chapter 22 (al-Hajj):

Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Sabeians, the Christians, the Magians and the polytheists —God will indeed judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed God is witness to all things. (22:17)

Let's study these verses. When God created Adam and sent him to earth as a successor, He sent guidance with him as mentioned in following verse:

He said, 'Get down both of you from it, all together, being enemies of one another! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance will not go astray, nor will they be miserable. (20:123)

Adam taught God's message to his children, who in turn passed it on to their children and so on. As time passed, people got distracted by worldly affairs and chased their desires leaving God's teachings behind. Allah wants to spread mercy and justice on earth, so He sent Messengers to remind people and bring them back to the righteous path.

In the verse under discussion, the phrase: '**Indeed the faithful**' points to people who followed God's path since the time of Adam. Time and again, Allah sent guidance to mankind, but when people rejected faith and distorted religion, they were punished and wiped off the face of the earth. Take the examples of the people of Noah, Lot, Pharaoh and many others.

Some religions had a large number of followers such as Judaism, and Christianity. However, overtime the scriptures were changed and people lost their path. Allah wants to purify us and gather all of us under one faith, under one scripture that cannot be changed, so He sent Prophet Muhammad with the message of Islam. He was sent to renew faith, and give us a system that would treat the ills of society till the day of judgment. Islam is the final message to encompass all previous religions. It is required from the followers of all other faiths to believe and support the message of Muhammad (Peace be upon him). God says:

God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' They said, 'We do.' He said, 'Then bear witness and I too will bear witness.' (3:81)

God's rules today are the same they were at the time of the Israelites: The path to salvation requires two conditions: proper faith and good deeds. If you lack one of these elements, you need to seriously reconsider, as you may face dire consequences in the hereafter. Based on these two conditions, those who remained on their previous religions, and did not follow God's final message will not earn salvation.

Indeed, God wants to correct the perceptions of those who love the Lord, have faith, but do not follow the teachings of Islam. He says:

Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers. (03:85)

and in another verse:

True Religion, in God's eyes, is Islam. Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge- if anyone denies God's revelations, God is swift to take account- (03:19)

Keep in mind that Islam does not dispense with or reject previous heavenly messages. In fact, Islam builds on previous religions, and corrects what was distorted or omitted by people. Those who accept Islam inherit the proper faith from all the Messengers and Prophets since the time of Adam. So whoever believes in Muhammad's message will have no fear or grief on the day of resurrection. God says:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his

Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'- (2:285)

Similarly, the Quran is the book that envelopes all the previous heavenly scriptures and clarifies many matters that were omitted or changed by people. So whoever holds the Quran as his or her book have actually inherited all the treasures of previous heavenly revelations since the time of Adam. God says:

We sent to you the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.(5:48)

and in another verse:

Truly, this Quran explains to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about (27:76)

It is interesting to note that the name of each faith reflects the fact that it was sent to correct the deviations and ills of society at the time. In the Arabic language, the name for the Jewish people is 'Al Yahood.' This name is derive from the verb 'Hudna' which means 'we turn back to you, God, after we had gone astray as the following verse illustrates:

Grant us good things in this world and in the life to come. We turn to You.' God said, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. 'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations (7:156)

Christians are known as 'Al Nasara' in Arabic. The name is derived from the word Annsar meaning supporters. As Prophet Jesus was being fought and prosecuted, the disciples pledged to help and support God's cause as the following verse illustrates:

When Jesus realized they did not believe, he said, 'Who will help me in God's cause?' The disciples said, 'We will be God's helpers; we

believe in God- witness our devotion to Him. (03:52)

Lastly, There is a difference of opinion over the identity of the Sabeians. According to some scholars, they were the followers of Prophet Noah. While others believe that the word is derived from the verb saba'a which refers to leaving one religion and entering another; this is most likely the correct interpretation.

Throughout history there were many people who saw the corruption and ills of society, and decided to distance themselves from it seeking justice and seeking the Creator. Thus, in this verse, they are also included among those who will be forgiven and earn the reward on the day of judgment.

Keep in mind that Allah always combines good deeds with proper faith. He says '**those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously**' because if faith is not practiced through righteous deeds, it becomes worthless. If you say that you are a Muslim, and then act otherwise, then you are doing harm to yourself and to Islam. If you declare that you are a Muslim, while at the same time you lie, cheat, commit acts of violence or harm others, then you are earning God's anger not reward. If, on the other hand, you believe, do good deeds, and benefit those around you, then you will never have anything to fear in this world and nor will you grieve in the hereafter.

Verse 63

Remember when We took your pledge, and made the mountain tower high above you, and said, 'Hold fast to what We have given you and bear its contents

in mind, so that you may be conscious of God.’ (Chapter 2: Verse 63)

This verse informs us about the pledge God took from the children of Israel. It is worth noting that when God addresses the children of Israel in the Quran, He addresses them directly often in the present tense. Was it the Jewish people of our time, or of the time of prophet Muhammad who took this covenant with God? Clearly, it was the people of Moses who did. So why would God address all the followers of Judaism directly? in other words why does the Quran say: 'remember when *you*,' or 'We took *your* pledge'? This is because God's favors and obligations extend to the Jewish people of all time. It is the duty of every father to convey the message of faith to the next generation. Allah is reminding the Israelites of His favor when He destroyed Pharaoh and saved them from death. If He did not save their forefathers, then they would not have existed today. In fact, every favor blessed upon the people of Moses is a favor upon the Jewish people from that moment on. Here is another example: ‘**when Moses asked for water for his people**’. This is a great favor to all the Children of Israel, because if God did not save the people of Moses from thirst, then all the future generations would have not come into existence.

Let's apply this concept to the verse under discussion. God took a pledge from the people of Moses in order protect their faith. If this covenant was not made, then God's teachings would have been lost for all generations to come.

The verse continues ' **and made the mountain tower high above you**'. The story begins right after God saved the Israelites from Pharaoh. Prophet Moses went to his Lord's appointment at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. When he returned he was shocked and angered to see his people worshipping a golden calf. After the Israelites repented and received God's mercy, they started complaining about the religious duties God prescribed them in the Torah and on the slates. Some wanted to reject God's teachings all together, while other wanted to pick and choose what to follow.

God has the perfect knowledge of His creation. Not only does He prescribe what is best for us, but He also prescribes what is well within our abilities. The Israelites claimed that God had burdened them with

what was beyond their ability. Allah explains:

God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear: each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad- (02:286)

Some people misinterpret this verse for their own benefit. They think that it is up to them to decide what they can bear and what they are not able to do. When they are faced with a religious obligation that they like, they do it. When they are faced with a religious duty that is tuff, or inconvenient, they say we are not obligated to do it because '**God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear.**' In other words, they want to be the judges of which of God's commands applies to them.

The truth is exactly the opposite, Allah is the best judge and has absolute knowledge of what you and I are able to do. So, when Allah assigns a duty to you, then rest assured that it is well within your ability because ' **God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear'**

Do not excuse yourself from God's teachings arguing that times have changed. In this modern and fast paced world, you may tell yourself that you are too busy to do so and so……After all, people's lives at the time of Prophet Muhammad were much simpler, and there was plenty of time to do all the religious duties. Keep in mind that these duties have been assigned by Allah. He is well aware of what all generations from the time of Adam till the day of judgment are capable of doing. Don't you personally know people that fulfill all their religious obligations and do much more? Don't you know people today who are busy, yet find time to pray the obligatory prayers, and then add many more? There are those who go to Hajj many times, and those who connect with God a good part of each night. Thus, the obligations God assigned you are all well within your ability and can be easily done if you have the right frame of mind.

This brings us back to the verse. When God raised Mount Toor above the heads of the Children of Israel, it was out of mercy. How can that be, you may ask? Think about a medical doctor who uses a surgical knife to cut and remove pus from his patient's body. The body cannot be cured without the use of a sharp knife. Similarly, when God wanted to show His mercy and compassion for the Israelites, He compelled them to obey by raising the mountain above their heads forcing them to accept His teachings as a whole.

Here you may ask: doesn't the Quran say **'There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error,'** and in another verse God says: **' Say, 'Now the truth has come from your**

Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.'? Then how come God coerced the Jews to carry out duties and obligation while these verses clearly say that there shall be no compulsion?

We answer that God does not force you into any belief or obligation. He lays out for you the choice between faith, with all its obligations, and all the great rewards in the hereafter, and between disbelief, temporary freedom from obligation, and the grave consequences on judgment day. You have the freedom of choice. However, if you choose faith, then you must accept all the obligations that come with it. In other words, if you choose God's path, you cannot say that I want to do such and such, but I do not want to do this or that. Faith comes as one complete package.

Similarly, God gave Moses' people the freedom of choice. However, when they chose to worship God, they had to accept all the obligations that came with this choice. In fact, many nations before them were given the choice between obedience and disobedience, and when they disobeyed and denied faith they were destroyed. When the Israelites saw the mountain raised above their heads, they fell in prostration, pledged faith and were saved from destruction.

This event is mentioned in other verses of the Noble book:

When We uprooted the mountain, lifting it above them like a canopy, and they thought it was about to fall on them, We said, 'Hold fast to what We have given you, and remember what it contains, so that you may remain conscious of God.' (7:171)

The command **'Hold fast to what We have given you and bear its contents in mind'** means that you are not supposed to take God's teachings lightly. Normally, people pay attention to whatever benefits them and take it seriously, while discarding the rest. God's teachings are the most valuable and beneficial matters to us in this world and the next. Thus we should take them seriously and act with determination. Only when you and I carry all our affairs with God in mine, and keep the teaching of the Quran foremost in our minds, that we may reap the great rewards of Our Lord.

Verse 64

Even after that you turned away. Had it not been for God's favor and mercy on you, you would certainly have been lost. (Chapter 2: Verse 64)

We discussed how God -out of mercy for the Israelites- required them to take His teachings as a whole. He advised them to hold on to these values and apply them with determination. Keep in mind that part of the complete package the children of Israel agreed to uphold included the support of a new prophet to appear in Arabia carrying the final revelation for all humanity. After all this advice.....after they were given what guaranteed the rewards of this world and the next, what was their response? God says: '**Even after that you turned away.'** meaning, either the Israelites dismissed God's teachings, or they forgot what they should have remembered and practiced.

God continues: '**Had it not been for God's favor and mercy on you, you would certainly have been lost.'** What is meant by favor and mercy? A Favor is something beyond what you deserve. For example: when you go to work, you collect a set salary at the end of the month. If you receive a bonus on top of your salary, then your employer has done you a favor.

Ayesha (the prophet's wife, may God be please with her) narrated that the Messenger said, "Follow the Right Path, be good to those around you, and be steadfast; but keep in mind that none of you can achieve salvation through his or her own good actions alone." Someone asked, "Not even you, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Not even me, unless God showers me with Mercy and Grace".

You may think to yourself: how is that possible? How can it be that our good deeds are never enough to earn paradise? It is because God's favors and bounties to each one of us are so plentiful and immense that our

good deeds are barely enough to show gratitude for one of them. In other words, if you put one of God's bounties -for example, the gift of eyesight, or that of one kidney- on one side of a scale, and all your good deeds on the other side, the side of God's bounty will tip over. We always remember our good actions, but rarely give gratitude for God's favor. That is why, when you enter paradise, it will only be through the sheer mercy and favor of God. He says describing those in paradise:

happy with what God has given them of His favor; rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet to join them there is no fear, nor will they grieve; (03:170)

In fact God's favors extend to every single person on this earth, regardless of faith or deed. God says in the 243rd verse of 'The Cow'

Allah shows great favor to mankind, but most people are not grateful

This brings us back to the verse, God is reminding the Israelites that if not for His favor and mercy, they wouldn't have had the opportunity to return to their covenant and scripture. They would have lost their way in this world, and suffered greatly in the hereafter. More importantly, Allah guided them towards the path of Islam and the Quran which He protected against alteration. The previous scriptures were great bounties from God, however, it was the responsibility of the faithful to preserve and protect the Holy books from changes, additions and omissions. With the gift of the Quran, God unburden all of us from the task of preserving the book. He says:

Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it. (15:9)

and in a verse about prophet Muhammad:

We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations. (21:107)

The Israelites were blessed by having the characteristics of Prophet Muhammad and the time of his advent in the Torah, and blessed with the opportunity to embrace Islam. Those who ignore such gifts are destined to great loss.

Verse 65

And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be apes, despised." (Chapter 2: Verse 65)

Allah gave us commands related to this world and commands related to the hereafter. He does not like us to take any of them lightly, or to pick and choose one over the other. Take the example of the following verses:

O you who believe! When the call is made for the Prayer on Friday, then move promptly to the remembrance of God, and leave off your trading. This is better for you, if you but knew. Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God's bounty and remember God often so that you may prosper. (62:9,10)

These verses carry commands relating to this world, and commands relating to the next. Allah does not want you to be so involved in your business and worldly affairs that you are late to or forget prayer. At the same time, He does not want you to spend all your time in the mosque that you ignore your needs and those of your family. Allah wants to bring balance to your life. Both, the first command: ' **When the call is made for the Prayer on Friday, then move promptly to the remembrance of God, and leave off your trading**' and the second command: '**when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God's bounty** ' are from our Lord, and we should give them equal importance.

Two days of the week are mentioned in the Quran 'Friday and Saturday'. Friday -Jum'ah- is the day of congregational prayer. Its Arabic name is derived from the word congregation. It is also named Jum'ah because on this day God gathered all the components of the newly created universe. We gather on this day to celebrate God's favor of creating the universe for humanity. Saturday 'sabt' or 'Sabbath' is derived from the Arabic verb 'sabata' which means to be inactive and relax. On Saturday nothing was

created, as the process of creation was already completed. The Quran says:

It was He who created the heavens and earth in six Days and then established Himself on the throne. He knows what enters the earth and what comes out of it; what descends from the sky and what ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are; He sees all that you do; (57:04)

When the Israelites asked God to grant them a day to relax, He appointed Saturday for that purpose. He, almighty, put them to the test to see if they appreciate and commit to what they had asked for.

A tribe of the Israelites lived by the sea and were fishermen by profession. As requested, God forbade them from working on Saturday, and assigned it as a day of reflection and worship. This allowed them rest, and brought balance to life. However, unlike other days of the week, every Saturday fish would be so abundant and swim so close to the shore that they became visible splashing all over the water as the following verse explains:

ask them about the town by the sea; how its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays- We tested them in this way: because of their disobedience- (07:163)

The Israelites did not see the blessing of rest and reflection, all they saw was the money they were losing by not fishing on Saturday; They came up with a plan. On Fridays, they would dig deep trenches, and spread nets in order to trap fish on Saturday. Then on Sunday, they would collect the catch, take it to market and sell it for a fat profit. While the villagers did not technically fish on Saturday, their actions took God's command lightly, and made a mockery of it. Keep in mind that they were the ones who had asked for a day of rest to begin with.

The phrase ' **And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the Sabbath**' indicates that this story was well known to the Jews even at the time of Prophet Muhammad and had been passed on from generation to generation.

Allah wants to protect you not only from sin, but also from being tempted into sin. He says:

these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them.(2:187)

Meaning, when something is prohibited, you are supposed to avoid it all

together, even avoid being near where you may be tempted. The Israelites transgressed God's command while pretending to obey Him. They thought they can manage to deceive their Lord. Thus, came the punishment at the end of the verse: **'be apes, despised.'**

A person can only be ordered to do what is within his or her ability. 'Be apes' is a command impossible for a any human to perform. Only God can do so. Thus, this command is known as 'subjugation command'. This transformation was for punishment and humiliation, it lasted for a very brief period of time as the transgressors died shortly after. It was a punishment specific and limited to those in this tribe who transgressed, therefore, they had no ability to reproduce. God says:

Say, 'Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things?' Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences. (06:164)

If they were able to reproduce then their offspring would have been burdened with the sins of their parents. This is against God's law in the universe.

It is sad to say that some contemporary scholars and those with agendas use such verses to spread hate and injustice especially at times of political tensions. The fact is, God is narrating these stories to remind us to respect and honor His commands. He says in the very next verse:

Verse 66

And We made it a deterrent punishment for those who were present and those who succeeded and a lesson for those who fear Allah (Chapter 2: Verse 66)

Meaning that this physical and moral transformation was made as an example for everyone present at the time and for all of us till the day of judgment.

In the field of law, a person is only punished if he or she commits a crime that was clearly prohibited, and has a clear and declared punishment. In other words: there is no punishment without a crime, and there is no crime without a declared pre-existing law. Islam, and all heavenly message, are based on the same approach. God says:

Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good; whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear another's burden, nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.(17:15)

Through scriptures and through prophets, Allah first defines His boundaries, and then announces the punishments. From that point on, if you violate these boundaries, then the punishment becomes incumbent on you.

The punishment of metamorphosis into another species was specific for the small minority of the tribe of the Israelites who transgressed on the Sabbath. It was a lesson for the Jewish people of that time, and a lesson for all of us to respect God's laws and bounties. Such incidents are narrated and passed onto generations so they avoid similar acts that earn God's anger.

Verse 67

Remember when Moses said to his people, 'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said, 'Are you making fun of us?' He answered, 'God forbid that I

should be so ignorant.' (Chapter 2: verse 67)

This verse marks the beginning of the story this chapter is named after. When you read the verse, you understand that God had ordered the slaughter of a cow, but you do not know the reason behind it. In order to completely understand this incident you need to read the a few verses ahead:

Remember when you killed a man and blamed each other for the deed, God brought to light what you concealed. We said, 'Strike the body with a part of the cow': thus God brings the dead to life and shows His signs so that you may understand. (02:72-73)

Why would God give us the reason five verses later? Logically, shouldn't the story start with the reason? We answer: It is so you and I would learn that questioning the reason behind a command is only relevant if the commander is equivalent to you. God cannot be questioned about His orders, rather, we should obey our Lord whether we understand the wisdom behind His orders or we do don't. Take the example of a mother asking her child to do something, or a doctor advising his patient. Your mom's request and your doctor's advice should be followed even if you don't understand the reason behind them. You know that your mom has your best interest at heart; you also trust your doctor and know that he or she had spent years acquiring knowledge to treat your illness. You can only discuss the doctor's recommendations if you have the same degree as he or she does. Similarly, you can ask Allah for the reason behind His teachings only if you have the same knowledge or wisdom as He does. Do you believe in your creator? Do you trust that Allah has your best interest at heart? If you need an explanation for every act of worship, then you believe in the reason, not in Allah. In that case, there would be no difference between a believer and a non-believer as neither of them is striving to do good acts for God's pleasure and reward.

Let's clarify this point with an example: offering prayer is God's command and it should only be done out of obedience for Him. If you pray thinking that it is a good form of exercise or because it gives you a reason to wake up early, then such a prayer will not earn any rewards. If you intend to exercise then go to the gym. Prayer should be offered because it is God's command. This is the case behind every act of worship. I do not fast during Ramadan to feel the hunger of the poor. I

fast because Allah ordered me to do so.

Faith in Allah is the main force that drives the believer to do good deeds. That is why, before issuing a command or a teaching, God says '**O you who believe**' then He states the command: do so and so, and stay away from so and so. The reason behind each and every command, behind each and every prohibition is your belief in God.

This brings us back to the verse: God commanded the slaughter of a cow first, and later mentioned the reason behind it. True believers are expected to obey God's orders whether they understand the reason or not; they trust that His commands have true wisdom even if it not apparent.

When the command was issued without explanation, it was meant to test the faith of the Children of Israel and see if they act upon it without delay. They failed this test, and started disputing with prophet Moses and asking one question after another.

In this verse, the Arabic word God used for **'Moses' people'** was 'Qaum.' It is derived from the verb 'qama' which means to do an act, or to get up and move. This word is used specifically to address a group of men, not a group of women, as the following verse clarifies:

Believers, no one group of men should mock another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should mock another, who may after all be better than them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behavior are evildoers. (49:11)

The phrase 'group of men' is translated from the Arabic origin 'Qaum' separating it from the group of women addressed in the 2nd part of the verse.

The command issued by Allah to the men of the villages was clear and simple: '**slaughter a cow**.' It does not require any further explanation, and can be carried out in a straight forward manner. Had the Israelites obeyed without questioning, life would have been easy. Sadly, they went to great length to stall, obstruct, and try to get out of this obligation. They started by hassling Moses: Are you making fun of us? they said. They could not bring themselves to accept the fact that God ordered them to slaughter a cow without specification. So they accused Moses of ridiculing them. Can a Prophet ever make jokes in regards to God's commands? Of course not. Moses realized that he could not win an

argument with a group determined to obstruct. At this point, he turned to the heavens and asked for refuge in God. He said '**'God forbid that I should be so ignorant.'**

Verse 68

They said, `Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is.' He replied, `Says He, "It indeed is a cow neither too old nor too young, but of middle age, in between." Now do as you are commanded.' (Chapter 2: Verse 68)

This verse gives us great insight into the mindset of Moses' people. The phrase **'call upon your Lord'** shows lack of faith as they attributed God to Moses, not to themselves. It was as if He is the Lord of Moses alone. A person with proper faith would have said: 'Moses: call upon our Lord'. Sadly, we see this trait repeated in many situation as the following example illustrates:

They said, 'We will never enter it, Moses, as long as they are there. So you and your Lord go and fight. We will stay sitting here.' (05:24)

The conversation between Moses and his people continued for a while. They asked one question after another, and each time Moses turned to the Lord for the answer. Every answer led to another irrelevant question. Finally, to stop this back and forth, God complicated the matter, and made His request so specific that it would fit one single cow. In other words, they made matters difficult for themselves, so God treated them in-kind and burdened them even more.

Let’s take a look at the various questions the Israelites asked. Perhaps the first question is the most foolish and irrelevant. **`Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is.'** They already had the answer to this question. What is it? it is a cow. God had commanded them to slaughter a cow which leaves no room for confusion. Thus, God's answer came: '**It indeed is a cow**' and then He added ' **neither too old nor too young, but of middle age, in between.**' In essence Allah was describing the average cow that can be found at any farm. Thus, He ended the answer with a scolding: ‘**Now do as you are commanded'** to let the Israelites know that things are clear, and there is no need for delay. Sadly, the next verse shows, they did not listen:

Verse 69

They said, ‘Call on your Lord for us, to show us what color it should be.’ He answered, ‘God says it should be a bright yellow cow, pleasing to the eye.’ (Chapter 2: Verse 69)

They asked Moses about its color. God replied that it is yellow making it a delight to look at. We can see a pattern here, as more questions are asked, God answers and adds another detail indicating to the Israelites that with each question, things are getting more difficult. Thus, He answers not only with a color, but He also adds the desired shade and brightness.

One would think that the information is more than sufficient and the questions would stop, but the next verse shows otherwise:

Verse 70

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, all cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allah wills, will be guided. (Chapter 2: Verse 70)

Armed with a clear description and specifications, Moses' people set out to search for this cow. However, they started to disagree and argue among themselves. One believed that a certain cow fits the description, while another refused and said no this is not the one. So they returned to prophet Moses and told him to ask God again because all the cows look alike. Moses turned to the Lord and came back with the answer:

Verse 71

He replied, He says ‘It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields.’ They said,

‘Now you have brought the truth,’ and so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so. (Chapter 2: verse 71)

The cow has not been used to plough the earth, to draw water from a well, nor any hard labor. Thus, it is free of all blemishes and imperfections.

These very specific answers reflect that God intended to make the task difficult as a punishment for stalling and wavering on His command. In fact, this description could only fit one single cow. The Israelites said: ‘**now you have brought the truth**’ as if whatever He had said before about the cow was not true. Even when they were armed with what they considered the truth, they were reluctant to do the task and slaughter the cow. As you transgress against God's teachings, a barrier builds within yourself making the acts of worship difficult. God says: '**so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so**.' Compare that to the actions of true believers who love the Lord and look forward to fulfill His orders and be in His company. God says:

And hasten, as if competing with one another, to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-revering, pious. (03:133)

The rush of the believers to do righteous deeds echoes their love for Allah. Those with poor faith, and overwhelming love for the temporary pleasures of this world, approach God's teachings grudgingly, and only when they run out of excuses.

It is worth noting that Allah, through His wisdom and fairness, made the Israelites pay for their actions with difficulties, and at the same time, used them to benefit a righteous man who kept God first and foremost in all his affairs. It is said that among the children of Israel lived a pious man. He was poor but very careful about how he earned his living; it had to be earned honestly. Everything that he did was done for the sake of Allah, never out of greed or selfishness. On his deathbed his last words were: "O God, I entrust my wife, my little boy, and my only possession, a calf, to your care." He knew that his wife could barely take care of the household and raise his son, and she could not care for the calf. So, he

entrusted this calf to God's care and let it loose right before he died.

After a few years had passed, and the little boy had grown up, his mother told him: 'Your father left you a little fortune: A calf, that should be a cow by now." The son was surprised. All these years He did not know of any calf, so he asked his mother where it was. She replied: "Your father entrusted it to God and set it free. Be like him and say: 'I put my trust in you Lord, please guide me to my cow.'"

The young man prostrated himself before God and supplicated: "O God, Lord of Abraham and Moses, return to me my father's gift." then he set out to look for it. Barely a day had passed and he saw a cow coming towards him. It stopped submissively next to him and he started to lead it to his house.

While on the way, a group of the Israelites saw the cow and realized that it fit God's description perfectly. They offered to buy it. The young man told them he would have to consult his mother first, so they accompanied him to his house and offered her three gold coins. She refused……..they increased their bid to 5 coins, then 10. They went on increasing their offer, and the mother kept refusing. Finally they urged the son to speak to his mother to be reasonable. He told them: "I will not sell the cow without my mother's approval, even if you offer me its skin-fill in gold!" When the mother heard this, she smiled and said: "Let that be the price: its skin-fill of gold."

The Israelites had backed themselves into a corner and realized that no other cow could possibly match God's description. They had to have it at any price, so they agreed to buy it.

Verse 72

Remember when you killed a man and blamed each other for the deed, God

brought to light what you concealed. (Chapter 2: Verse 72)

There was a very wealthy man from among the Children of Israel who was not blessed with any children. This meant that his relatives would inherit him when he dies. His nephew wanted the inheritance, but did not want to wait. He put together a plan, and one night, he killed his uncle and moved the body to the backyard of a house in the neighboring village. The next morning, the villagers found the body, and naturally, the family of the victim accused the man who had the body on his property. The nephew cried out for revenge…..the blame game started, and matters escalated between the two villages. Each party tried to strongly disassociate themselves from the crime while accusing the other; but there was no clear evidence supporting either side.

At that time, the law stated that if a person was murdered and the murderer was unknown, the family of the victim would ask the accused party to select fifty eminent members from amongst them to swear by God that they did not commit the murder, nor had they any knowledge of the killers. If the prominent members were less than fifty, then the oaths had to be repeated until the number reached fifty. If they swore by God that they did not commit murder, or knew the killer, then the public treasury takes the responsibility of paying the blood money to the victim's family.

But God intended to use this incident to show the people of the two villages that resurrection and the day of judgment are true. He wanted the dead to arise before them and speak of his killer. He said ' **God brought to light what you concealed.'** This miracle meant to serve two purposes: first, it would strengthen the faith of the Israelites as they were starting to waiver regarding God's teachings and ignore the consequences of the hereafter; and second it would show that God has perfect knowledge of all our actions. He was about to expose a matter that was very carefully planned and perfectly concealed. After all, the nephew acted alone under the cover of darkness, and took all precautions to conceal his crime. No one had seen him commit this crime, and he went the extra mile to frame an innocent person. In his view, he had committed the perfect crime.

Allah wants you and I to have no doubt of His knowledge. He revealed the crime in a manner that left absolutely no room for arguments as the

next verse illustrates:

Verse 73

We said, ‘Strike the body with a part of the cow’: thus God brings the dead to life and shows His signs so that you may understand. (Chapter 2: Verse 73)

When the dispute flared up, the villagers resorted to Moses and asked his help in tracing the killer. Moses instructed them to slaughter a cow, but as we saw from the previous verses, they stalled and delayed even in a matter that was urgent to them and threatened to destroy their community. Thus, they had to find one specific cow and slaughter it. When they did, they were asked to take a part of its limb and strike the dead man's body with it.

Miraculously, the victim came to life. Keep in mind that a few days had passed since the murder, so the Israelites had no doubt that the victim was dead, and his corpse had started to decay. They were also the ones who slaughtered the cow with their own hands. They based so many things on materialism, so Allah made sure that the material aspect was very clear to them. Upon striking part of a dead cow on the victim’s dead body, he awoke and named his killer then died again. God says:

He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and revives the earth after its death. Likewise you shall be raised. (30:19)

This was meant to show the Israelites how God gives life after death. Life has certain rules, but above all, it is subjected to the will of the Creator. He says: '**thus God brings the dead to life and shows His**

signs so that you may understand.'

Verse 74

Even after that, your hearts became as hard as rocks, or even harder, for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God: He is not unaware of what you do. (Chapter 2: Verse 74)

The heart is where mercy, kindness and love reside. How can you fill your heart with love and compassion? It is through the remembrance of Allah. And when your heart becomes filled with healthy emotions, your whole body follows, and your actions reflect those emotions. Faith, after all, resides within the heart. God says:

God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray. (39:23)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) narrated: "Unquestionably, within the

body there is a lump of flesh; if it is sound and upright, the whole body is sound and upright, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Behold, it is the heart!”

So your heart is the key to righteousness. However, if it becomes inclined towards disbelief, it hardens and you start to engage in unlawful activities. In other words, when the heart is void from the remembrance of God, something else has to fill this empty space. More often than not, it is filled with the temporary pleasures of this world and the unhealthy chase after desires. Why, you may ask? because if you have no faith in Allah, then you have no faith in accountability in the hereafter, and this world becomes your only goal. You will chase after worldly gains in every possible way even if it involves injustice, transgression and devouring the rights of the weak. When your heart is void of mercy, it becomes easy for your hand to extend towards theft, and easy for your eye to look at the unlawful. So protect yourself and make sure to fill your heart with the treasure of Allah and the Quran.

This brings us back to the verse where God describes the hearts of the Israelites as ‘**hard as rocks, or even harder**.’ Every quality is created to perform a certain task. For example, a knife blade is fine and sharp, and this sharpness is the quality that allows the blade to perform its task of cutting. Without it, a knife has no use. Rocks and mountains are created hard and solid because these qualities are required for their function to stabilize the earth and hold structures. You cannot build with soft rocks. Likewise, the heart is supposed to be tender and soft so it can express love and mercy. But when the heart is corrupt, it becomes harder than rock and loses the ability to perform its task.

In this verse, God is informing us that even rocks can display mercy. He says: **'for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God.'** The miracle the Israelites witnessed with their own eyes came from solid rock as God saved them from thirst in the desert and gave them twelve springs.

In another example, Allah says:

and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, ‘Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!’(7:143)

This is a reminder that when God revealed himself to the mountain it

collapsed to dust out of respect and awe. The Israelites had witnessed these miracles firsthand, and these wonders should have filled their hearts with love towards the Lord, and compassion in dealing with each other and with Prophet Moses. Sadly, their hearts hardened, and showed less mercy and compassion than the rocks. How can you tell that the heart has hardened? It is clearly reflected through actions and deeds.

Let's take a moment to explain the difference between the two phrases '**there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open**' When a spring streams out of a rock, it flows to the people and delivers water straight to them. When, on the other hand, a stone splits open and water comes out, the water pools and people have to go and collect it. With the stream, there is the added benefit of water being delivered to you.

The phrase: '**And God is not unaware of what you do.'** is a reminder to all of us that nothing we do escapes Allah. You and I will meet our Lord on the day of resurrection where each of us will face the consequences of every deed big or small. At that moment, you will be in desperate need for God's mercy and forgiveness. So ,if you wish for your Lord's mercy on that day, make sure not to allow your heart to become hard. Always fill it with the treasure of the remembrance of Allah. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Show mercy to those around you, and God will be merciful to you"

Verse 75

Do you really hope they will follow you in faith when a group of them heard Allah's Word and then, after grasping it, knowingly distorted it? (Chapter 2: Verse 75)

In this verse, Allah addresses the people of Medina who had just embraced Islam. The followers of this new faith expected the Jewish tribes of Medina to join them and accept Islam because they were already people of scripture. They had a connection with the Lord, and had been boasting about the coming of a new prophet. God consoles Muhammad (peace be upon him), and tells him not to expect them to rush to believe because they have a long history of transgressing against God's messages and exhausting their Prophets.

In this, and in many other verses that comfort the Prophet, God explains to Muhammad that his task is to convey the message, not to chase after those who deny or ignore it. The Prophet wanted entire mankind whether Christians, Jews or disbelievers to come into the fold of Islam. He understood the necessity and urgency to bring everyone salvation in this world and the next. Keep in mind that their disbelief in him, their ridicule, and denial did not make the Prophet angry, resentful or wanting to seek revenge; rather it filled his heart with sorrow for them. God says describing the prophet:

Perhaps you may destroy yourself with grief, chasing after them, if they do not believe in these words. (18:6)

This is how the Muslims today should feel about those who deny, ridicule or try to harm the prophet. Sadly, we often see the opposite reaction. We see anger, resentment, and even violence from many Muslims which drives people away from Islam. Our beloved prophet is our leader and our example. When the prophet was harmed or ridiculed, He (peace be upon him) and his companions felt sorrow, not for himself, but for the loss the people harming him will experience in the hereafter. They responded by doubling their efforts to spread God's teachings and to invite people to the fold of Islam. It was their patience and compassion that spread Islam to all corners of the world.

This brings us back to the verse. Prophet Muhammad and the believers around him had true hope and desire in their heart that the Jewish tribes of Medina would embrace Islam. A person usually hopes for something very dear to him or her, and at the same time something that is beneficial. However, hope should only be for something within the person's ability. Are you able to make any person believe in God?....... Does the prophet have any ability to make a single person believe in God? The answer is simply: no. Allah tells His Messenger that this is not part of your mission. You are only responsible for delivering the message and for inviting people to faith. What each person does with the information is

completely up to him or her.

This verse also informs the Prophet of the problems he will face from the Jewish residents of Medina. When you know what to expect, you can prepare and be better equipped to face any difficulties.

The verse also explains to prophet Muhammad the reason behind all their rejection. God says: **'a group of them heard Allah's Word and then, after grasping it, knowingly distorted it'** Take note that God specifically states that it was group among them causing trouble, not all of them. This is because Allah wants to guard those who did not distort His words, and give comfort to those who are considering Islam but have not joined it yet.

In other words, Allah does not generalize. He always leaves room for those who will believe, and those who may change their minds in the future. There was a group amongst the people of scripture who knew the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad mentioned in the Gospel and the Torah, so they believed in him. Some took more time than others to leave their faith for the new message. If the Quran had generalized and put all the Jewish people under one category, then the disbelievers would have said that the Quran was wrong. More importantly, those who were considering Islam may have been turned off by being labeled and abandoned the thought of believing.

Perhaps the most important part of the verse is the following phrase describing how they '**heard Allah's Word and then, after grasping it, knowingly distorted it'** because it shows a compounded sin. Not only did God's word reach them, but they also understood it, knew the reward and punishment of their actions, yet willingly chose to distort it. In other words, they had complete knowledge of Prophet Muhammad in the scriptures, and knew that he came with the truth; yet, they rejected him and his message, and distorted God's word to lead others astray. They changed God's words, caused great harm to the society, then claimed that their words were part of the Torah.

Verse 76

When they meet the believers, they say, ‘We too believe.’ But when they are alone with each other they say, ‘How could you tell them about God’s revelation to us? They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?’ (Chapter 2: Verse 76)

When it comes to faith, people are generally divided into three categories: believers, disbelievers and hypocrites. The believer is the one who is in harmony with himself. He or she says and acts according to the belief within the heart. A believer is also in harmony with the universe because they are both performing the task assigned by their Lord.

A disbeliever is in harmony with him or herself, because he or she says and acts according to the belief within the heart. However, a disbeliever is out of balance with the universe. The universe is upright performing its task according to the Lord, while the disbeliever lives away from God's teachings.

Lastly, a hypocrite lives in complete disharmony within him or herself and with the universe. This concept is illustrated in this verse as the hypocrites declare what they do not believe, and act against their convictions. This life of constant lie and deceit earns the hypocrite the worst punishment in the lowest depths of hell.

Earlier in this chapter we came across a similar verse. God says:

And when they meet those who believe, they say, We believe; and when they are alone with their devils, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking. (2:14)

The 14th verse speaks of the era when the hypocrites were from amongst the disbelievers in Mecca. The verse we are studying today is related to

the hypocrites from amongst the people of the scriptures in Medina.

Here we should ask the question: Is faith a statement that we say, or is it something deeper? Faith is a certainty in the heart, and is not a statement made by the tongue. Our daily conduct is what proves the true state of faith. Similarly, God exposes the hypocrites not by what they say, but through their actions. He says: '**But when they are alone with each other they say, 'How could you tell them about God's revelation to us?'** And in another verse:

Look, you are the ones who love them and they do not love you. You believe in all the books. When they meet you, they say, "We believe." and when they are alone, they bite their finger-tips out of rage against you. Say, .May you perish in your rage. Surely, Allah is All-Aware of what lies in the hearts. (03:119)

and lastly:

When they come to you, they say, 'We believe,' but they come disbelieving and leave disbelieving- God knows best what they are hiding. (05:61)

In these verses you can see four different situations depicting the hypocrites' actions. The first states: **'…but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, "Indeed, we are with you."** The second verse describes that '**when they are alone with each other they say, 'How could you tell them about God's revelation to us?'**' The third states: '**they say, .We believe., and when they are alone, they bite their finger-tips out of rage against you**' And in the fourth verse God says: '**they say, 'We believe,' but they come disbelieving and leave disbelieving**.' The common thread between all these actions is the clear contradiction between the way they act in public, and their true belief and actions in private.

When the news of a new Prophet spread across Arabia, the Jews informed the residents of Medina that the descriptions of the Prophet are mentioned in the Torah. Their Rabbis rushed to stop them and said: '**'How could you tell them about God's revelation to us?**' indicating that they knew that Prophet Muhammad was the truth, but rather than spread God's word, they wanted to conceal it. And then they added: '**They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord!'** This statement means that they were aware that they will meet the Lord on the day of judgment and have to answer to Him. If they had all that knowledge, and understood that they have to defend their actions before

the Lord, then why did they disbelieve in the Prophet? Did they really think that they, or anyone, can fool the Lord, or hide facts from Him? Thus the answer came from God with this scolding '**Have you no sense?'** because anyone who commits such actions, while fully aware of the facts and the consequences has certainly lost his or her mind.

Now, let's move to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

Verse 77

Do they not know that God is well aware of what they conceal and what they declare? (Chapter 2:Verse 77)

Allah explains to us that He knows all their affairs. In the previous verse, we were informed of what the hypocrites of Medina said when they met each other secretly. Nothing is concealed from God, even actions that do not involve any words. Take the example of the verse stating '**they bite their fingertips at you in rage**.' in which Allah even revealed the emotions they had at that moment.

So what is meant by that which is concealed and that which is declared? The declared involves what is heard by the ears or seen by the eyes. If you conceal something, it means that you do not even whisper it to anyone else. Once you tell someone else, even in secrecy, the matter is no longer concealed. So the phrase '**What they conceal**' refers to something that is kept totally to one's self. On the other hand, '**What they declare'** refers to matters that are told to others, even if only two people know about it. We see this distinction in the following verse. God says:

Though you speak out loud, He knows your secrets and what is even

more concealed (20:07)

When you recite the phrase: '**God is well aware of what they conceal and what they declare**' you may ask yourself, Why did God mention that he is aware of what they declare? If God is aware of what the hypocrites conceal, then surely He knows what they declare, right? Not necessarily. Take the example of a father in his home. He says that he is aware of what is happening within the house. This statement is logical because he is inside the house; but when he says: I am also aware of what is going on outside the walls of this house, then the statement becomes questionable.

Similarly, God is unseen and concealed from us. So when He says that He aware of all that is concealed from us, it makes sense. However, Allah does not want you to misunderstand that He is only knows the unseen. He is fully aware of both: what is declared and what is hidden.

Verse 78

Some of them are uneducated, and know the Scripture only through wishful thinking. They rely on guesswork. (Chapter 2: Verse 78)

There are many definitions proposed by scholars as to who is considered illiterate. Here is the most common definition: It is a person who has not acquired any knowledge beyond what he or she was born with. However, this verse is not referring to someone who has zero education; Allah describes those who '**know the Scripture only through wishful thinking. They rely on guesswork**' specifying that the lack of education

is regarding the Torah and the Gospel.

‘**Some of them are uneducated**’ is telling us about a group from among the people of the book who opposed the new Islamic movement and the teachings of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Mainly, the Christians of Mecca and the Jews in Medina. However, in this verse the discussion is more specific to a group from the Jewish tribes of Medina, because the Christians in Mecca and Medina were very few. Keep in mind that the phrase **'some of them'** also reflects that there were others who were educated and had true knowledge. In other words, we are dealing with two groups from the Jews of Medina: a group that is illiterate and cannot read the scriptures, and another who had access to the knowledge. If the uneducated had known what was in the Torah regarding the advent of a Prophet, along with timing and descriptions, they might have believed in him.

However, their information about the Torah came from wishful thinking. What does ‘**wishful thinking**’ mean? It refers to a desire and an aspiration a person may have about something impossible to get. Some people have defined it as fabricating dreams. A poet said:

I wish youth will come back one day so I may tell it of what old age has done to me.

Can youth ever return? Of course not! It is an impossible wish. "wishful thinking' is translated from the word ‘umniyah’ which is also mentioned in the following verse of the Nobel book:

It will be neither after your hopes nor the hopes of the People of the Book: whoever commits evil shall be requited for it, and he will not find for himself any guardian or helper besides Allah. (04:123)

Here, the evil doers are wishing for something impossible: that there will be no consequences for their actions in the hereafter.

So when you recite the phrase ’**Some of them are uneducated, and know the Scripture only through wishful thinking.'** it should reminder you that each one of us is responsible for educating him or herself about God's book. Otherwise, it becomes easy to follow guesswork and fall prey to those who want to abuse the scriptures for their own benefit. Allah also wants you to understand that you are responsible for your own actions. Look around you, the world is filled with unlearned people who rely on the knowledge -and often manipulation- of others when it comes to religious teachings without even pondering over them for a single

moment. God Almighty warns us:

Say, 'Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things?' Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences. (06:164)

and in another verse warning those who take advantage of the uneducated:

On the Day of Resurrection they will bear the full weight of their own burden, as well as some of the burden of those they misled with no true knowledge. How terrible their burden will be! (16:25)

At first glance, you may say that these two verses contradict each other: one is saying that no person will bear the burden of another, while the second verse indicates that those who mislead others will bear the burden of others. However, on closer examination, you will find no contradiction. Whoever commits a sin will be fully responsible for it, and whoever misleads others or facilitates sin for them will bear the burden of his own sins, and the added sin of misguiding others. Perhaps the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained it best when he said:

"If anyone calls others to follow right guidance, his reward will be equivalent to those who follow him in righteousness without their reward being diminished in any respect. And whoever invites others to follow error, his sin will be equivalent to that of the people who follow him in error without their sins being diminished in any respect".

This is especially true for those pseudo-scholars who issue religious opinion without knowledge, and those who issue rulings to gain personal benefit, wealth and status. They will bear the terrible sin of misguiding others into the day of judgment.

The verse concludes with: '**They rely on guesswork.'** There are many people, even today, who recite the Quran, Bible or Torah without understanding them. In other words, they are only read the words and do not apply any of God's teachings. God says:

The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah, and did not carry out its commands, is like the donkey carrying books; what a wretched example is of the people who denied the signs of Allah; and Allah does not guide the unjust. (62:05)

A person who believes in the scriptures, but does not understand the teachings, or a person who reads the scriptures but does not take the time

to act accordingly, is like a mule carrying a load of books. The mule is burdened by the heavy weight without gaining any benefit from the knowledge on its back. It is our task as believers to use our intellect to study and understand our Lord's teaching.

Verse 79

So woe to those who write the scripture with their own hands, then say, "This is from God," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn. (Chapter 2: Verse 79)

In the previous verse, God informed us about a group amongst the people of the scriptures who were uneducated and knew little about God's teachings. This verse draws a picture of another group. A group that is educated and well aware of what the scriptures teach, but instead of spreading God's word, they alter it and write verses with their own hands then say they are from God. Thus, He warned them and said: ‘woe to them’ which is translated from the Arabic origin 'Wayl.' It means destruction and punishment, and can also be used to express deep regret. God says:

The record of their deeds will be laid open and you will see the guilty, dismayed at what it contains, saying, ‘Woe to us! What a record this is! It does not leave any deed, small or large, unaccounted for!’ They will find everything they ever did laid in front of them: your Lord will not be unjust to anyone. (18:49)

and in another verse:

And the true promise of the Last Hour has been close at hand, and look, the eyes of those who stubbornly disbelieve stare in horror fixedly, exclaiming: "Woe to us! Indeed we have lived in heedlessness and forgetfulness of this. Ah! We truly have been wrongdoers (21:97)

It is also said that ‘Wayl’ is the name of a terrible valley in hellfire. God Almighty warned those who fabricate verses that their punishment on the Day of Judgment will be multiplied because they will be burdened with the sin of each person who was misled by their work.

Here you may ask: Wouldn't it have been sufficient if God had said: ‘woe to those who write the scripture’? Why was the phrase ‘**with their own hands**’ added? The meaning would have been clear without it. We answer that it was necessary to mention ‘**with their own hands**’ because it portrays the willingness to commit this grave sin. When you plan a heinous act, you usually try to distance yourself from it, and may even ask someone else to get it done. Sadly, in this case those who were altering God's words wanted to do it with their own hands. They wanted to make sure that the alterations were made exactly as they planned in order to serve their own needs. Their goal was to exchange God's verses for the small price of temporary wealth, leadership and authority.

How did it come down to this -you may ask-? At the time, when common people differed in a matter, they consulted their priests and Rabbis who acted as judges. This allowed for the disputes to be resolved and for everyone to be happy. After all, it was heavenly legislation that decided the matter, and there were no feelings of defeat or humiliation. This win-win outcome is possible when everyone humbly submits to the judgment of God and remains satisfied whatever the verdict may be.

Sadly, people started to notice that some priests and rabbis were passing contradictory judgments -often to their own benefit-. One scholar would give a ruling according to his desire and what suited his audience, while the next scholar did the opposite. Justice was lost and people started to lose faith in the religious hierarchy. Here, as the persists and rabbis were backed into a corner, they started falsifying the scriptures to support their cases; They inscribed the verses and ruling with their own hands and handed them out so people would perceive sacredness and accept the laws without argument.

The phrase ‘**Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn**’ shows how this sin is compounded and thus

the punishment is also compounded. Falsifying God's scriptures is a grave sin that deserves punishment. Moreover, all the earnings from it, whether wealth or power, also deserve destruction and punishment. Take the historic example of Europe during the dark ages. We saw indulgences, that claim to guarantee one's forgiveness and place in heaven, signed by the pope and sold by the church to the highest bidder.

Here we should pause and look at the meaning behind the word 'earn.' In this verse it is translated from the Arabic origin 'Kasaba.' The verb 'Kasaba' is normally used to describe lawful beneficial earnings, while the verb 'Iktasaba' is used to describe unlawful or harmful earnings. But in this verse, which clearly speaks of unlawful earnings, God used the verb ‘kasaba.’ Why? The answer is: unlawful earnings do not come natural and usually require extra effort, thus we use the longer verb 'Iktasaba' to convey this meaning. Take the example of a person stealing for the very first time. He or she would plan for days, and may hesitate whether to steal or not, and then, after the theft is committed he or she would worry for days about every sound and every movement. You can say that this person 'Iktasaba' the stolen goods and money. However, as this person continues to steal for years, he or she becomes a professional thief, and stealing becomes second nature. There is less worry, and no hesitation to commit the crime over and over. At that point you can say that he or she 'kasaba' the stolen goods and money. In another example, God uses the verb 'Kasaba', not 'Iktasaba', in the following verse:

Truly those who earn evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain. (2:81)

Note the description '**and are surrounded by their sins'** indicating repetition and complete involvement in earning sin making it second nature to this person.

Similarly, in the verse under discussion, God used the verb 'Kasaba' indicating that some persists and rabbis had reached the point where falsifying, adding or omitting from the scriptures became second nature to them. They lost no sleep over their actions. In fact they had completely rationalized this behaviour as the next verse clarifies:

God says:

Verse 80

They say, ‘The Fire will only touch us for a few days.’ Say to them, ‘Have you received a promise from God- for God never breaks His promise- or are you saying things about Him of which you have no real knowledge?’ (Chapter 2: Verse 80)

In this verse, God gives us an insight into the inner circles of those who falsify the scriptures. Satan had convinced them that they had attained success with the money and power earned from this sin. More importantly, they deluded themselves that any punishment they might receive in the hereafter will be minimal. They said **‘The Fire will only touch us for a few days.’**

In fact, the Arabic word they used for '**touch us'** was ‘mass’ which means a very light touch. This is in contrast to the word 'Lamss' which indicates a normal touch. For example, if I just lightly place the tips of my fingers on your hand I won't be able to feel the warmth of your hand or the softness of the skin; this is known as 'mass'.

Those falsifying the scriptures did not stop at minimizing how hellfire will affect them, they also used the term 'madooda ' indicating that the punishment will be of a very short duration -perhaps just a few days-. We find the same word used in the following verse in the story of prophet Joseph:

and they sold him for a pittance, a few small coins, considering him to be of little worth. (12:20)

All this talk about being barely touched by the fire for a few short days is wishful thinking on the part of persists and rabbis used to rationalize sin and beautify the earnings they received for falsifying the scriptures. God

responds: **Say to them, 'Have you received a promise from God- for God never breaks His promise-?'** In essence, He is informing them - through prophet Muhammad- not to judge or decide what the Lord would do. It is He alone who judges and decides.

Then the prophet continues: **- or are you saying things about Him of which you have no real knowledge?** We should take time to study this statement and learn the etiquette of prophethood, and the great character of Muhammad (peace be upon him). He did not use harsh language and accusations, rather he spoke in a gentle manner. He did not call them liars, nor did he threaten them, rather, he asked them to take a moment to reflect about their actions. When you tell a lie, even if everyone believes you, you still know within yourself that what you said is not true. Thus, the Israelites who were making these false statements about God and hellfire knew within themselves that they were lying regardless of how many followers believed them.

Prophet Muhammad extended the same advice to us. He (peace be upon him) said: "I am only a human being, and often you bring your disputes before me. Some of you may be more eloquent in presenting his case than the other, whereby I may consider that he is truthful and pass a judgment in his favour. If I ever pass a judgment in your favour and give you another person's right, whereby you were lying, then whatever you wrongfully take is nothing but a piece of hellfire. It is up to you to take it or leave it."

Verse 81

Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain. (Chapter 2: Verse 81)

In the previous verse, the persists and rabbis who falsified the scriptures for their own gain claimed that **‘The Fire will only touch us for a few days.’** In this verse, Allah begins His response with the word '**Truly**' indicating that what preceded was false and what will follow is the truth. Then, He Almighty continues that rather than being touched by the fire for a few days, they will be immersed in it for eternity.

The phrase ' **surrounded by their sins'** shows that those who repeatedly altered God's words had lived and breathed this sin every day, and left themselves no room to escape the evil deeds. Scholars also suggested that this verse is referring to polytheism, because it encompasses and taints a person's every action. It is an unforgivable sin in the hereafter as the following verse illustrates:

God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will, but anyone who joins partners with God has concocted a tremendous sin. (04:48)

Those who altered the scriptures and associate partners with God went beyond disobedience into the realm of polytheism. Thus, the natural consequence is that they '**will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain.'** Keep in mind that a person who commits minor and major sins will not remain eternally in hellfire. Only the disbelievers and polytheists will burn in perpetuity. As we discussed previously, Islam does not dispense with or reject previous heavenly messages, rather it builds on them and corrects what was forgotten, falsified, or misinterpreted. Thus, since the advent of Prophet Muhammad, those who remain on their previous religions, and do not follow God’s final message will not earn salvation. God says:

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter. (03:85)

When it comes to sin and forgiveness, one of the most important points to remember is the following: You may commit sin out of weakness and lack of self control. If you regret your actions with sincerity and repent to Allah, then, God willing, He will shower you with mercy and forgiveness. If, on the other hand, you commit sin, enjoy it, boast about it to your friends, and insist on repeating it, then you will be among the losers as the following verse illustrates:

God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them God will turn in mercy: For God is full of knowledge and wisdom. (04:17)

Let's move to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

Verse 82

while those who believe and do good deeds will be the inhabitants of the Garden, there to remain. (Chapter 2, Verse 82)

In the Nobel Quran, when Allah mentions hell and punishment, He also brings its opposite ‘paradise and its pleasures’. This style highlights the stark difference between the two, and gives the believer a reason to rejoice. Allah says:

Every soul will taste death and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed. The present world is only an illusory pleasure (03:185)

Success in the hereafter has two levels. You achieve the first level when you are spared from hellfire. At that point there are two possible outcomes: You maybe be transferred to al-A’raf, which is a midway point between paradise and hell reserved for those whose bad deeds are equal to their good deeds. This in by itself is great success. At yet a much higher level is the great reward of being admitted into paradise to enjoy its pleasures in perpetuity.

Verse 83

Remember when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: ‘Worship none but God; be good to your parents and relatives, to orphans and the poor; speak good words to all people; establish the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.’ Then all but a few of you turned away and paid no heed. (Chapter 2:Verse 83)

This verse speaks of the pledge God took from the Israelites. A pledge is a solemn and formal vow. Let's take a look at a few pledges mentioned in the Holy book: First, God instilled within each one of us a drive towards faith, and He took an oath from entire mankind to seek His path. We all experience this through our human instinct to search for a higher power and seek our creator. God points to this pledge in the following verse:

And when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this,’ (7:172)

Another pledge is the one Allah took from His prophets and messengers that they will inform their nations of the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They pledged to support him and ask their followers to believe in him when he arrives as mentioned in the following verse:

God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, ‘If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?’ They said, ‘We do.’ He said, ‘Then bear witness and I too will bear witness.’(3:81)

We find another pledge in chapter 4 of the Quran referring to the contract of marriage. God says:

If you wish to replace one wife with another, do not take any of her bride-gift back, even if you have given her a great amount of gold. How could you take it when you have been intimate with one another and they have taken a solemn pledge from you? (04:20-21)

In fact, marriage contract is emphasized as a 'solemn pledge' because it creates a bond that, in some respects, surpasses the bond between children and parents. If a father, for example, enters his daughter's room while she is changing her clothes, she would rush to cover herself, and he would turn and leave the room. On the other hand, a strange man, after entering into the marriage contract with the daughter, would have no issues seeing her in that situation. God says in the 187th verse of 'The Cow'

On the night of the fast it is lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives. They are clothing for you and you for them.

Now, let's examine in detail the pledge God took from the Children of Israel. It starts with '**We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: ‘Worship none but God.**' Monotheism is both: the paramount and the foundation of faith. This includes the belief in the Torah -God's book-, and in His Messenger Moses.

The next element in the pledge is: ‘**be good to your parents**’ because, after your Lord, they are the means for your existence. They brought you up while you were a child and catered to your every need. To deny the favour of your parents is to deny the favour of your Lord. In fact, when Allah ordered us to be 'be good to our parents,' He used the Arabic word

(ihsan) which means to go beyond duty and obligation. For example, when you offer the obligatory prayers, you are performing your duty. But if you add additional prayers and stay up at night worshipping the Lord, you would be doing ‘ihsan’. God says describing those who go beyond duty and do Ihsan:

As for the God-revering, pious: they will be in Gardens and springs, Taking what their Lord gave them, that they were before that good doers. sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for God’s forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived. (51:15-19)

After ordering us to treat our parents very well, God extends His mercy to include our relatives. It is a safeguard for the entire society. If all of us sincerely fulfil this duty, there would be no needy or poor in the community. Allah also extends His command for help and good treatment to those who lost family: the orphans. An orphan is any child whose father dies before he or she reaches the age of puberty. The father is the head of the family, usually the wage earner, and the protector of the children. This protection, is lost when the father dies. If we, as a community, follow Allah's command and properly take care of the orphans, then we will all stop living in fear of what will happen to our kids in case we die. Taking care of an orphan means that his or her rights should be fully protected, and his or her wealth fully guarded until the age of reason. Sadly, in many instances, we see greed and opportunism hovering over the wealth orphans.

How about those with no body to take care of them? those who have poor families, or live away from all relatives? Allah wants each one of us to help and protect the needy who cannot even meet their basic needs. A person in need may have some possessions, but they are insufficient. Thus, Islam established social solidarity. When the poor are taken care of by the rich, it produces a healthy society free of grudges and ill feelings. This type of environment can only be achieved when everyone is treated with respect, thus the next command comes from Allah telling us to **'speak good words to all people.'** Note that Allah wants you to treat all people well regardless of faith, race or social status. God says:

Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom and words of good advice; and reason with them in the most courteous way possible. Your Lord surely knows who strays from His path, and He knows those who are guided the right way. (16:125)

Next, the verse moves from commands that protect the community to

commands that protect the individual. God says: ‘**And establish prayer**.’ Take note that Allah does not want you to simply perform prayer, rather He used the word 'establish'. This means that you should perform and execute the prayer in its proper form on a regular and consistent basis. This includes both the outward and inward aspects of prayer. You are asked to perfect the physical act of prayer, and to accompany it with diligence, humbleness and humility.

Next, Allah commands to ‘**pay the prescribed alms.**’ The system of Zakat is a system for the rich to support the poor by giving them a small percentage of their wealth, hence, each person’s basic needs in the society are met. When a person in need receives his or her right from Zakat, he or she will pray for the wealthy to be blessed, rather than be resentful towards them. In Islam, poverty has its own right. If for example, you have a relative that is poor, then this person will have two rights on you; the right of poverty and the right of kinship. Likewise, the orphan who is poor also has two rights; one for being an orphan and the other for being poor.

God says at the end of the verse: ‘**Then all but a few of you turned away and paid no heed.'** meaning that those who followed the Lord's commands and honoured their pledge were only a small group of the Israelites. Allah is just, He respects those who obeyed His commands and raises them above the rest. He does not target the Jewish people as a group, rather He targets the specific behaviours of those who wilfully go astray.

Verse 84

And when We took a pledge from you: "Do not shed your blood and do not expel yourselves out from your homes, then you acknowledged it at the time,

and you can testify to this. (Chapter 2: Verse 84)

In the 83rd verse of 'The Cow,' eight elements were mentioned which the Israelites pledged to do. This verse supplements the previous one, and talks about the other elements they were prohibited from doing.

‘**Do not shed your blood'** forbids the Children of Israel from killing each other. Note that the phrase '**your blood**' refers to the entire community as a single unit. Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said: “**The example of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.**” We, as a Muslim community, are supposed to be one single unit. God says in the 61st verse of chapter 'Al Noor':

So when you enter houses, greet yourselves with a salutation from Allah, blessed and good. Thus does Allah clarify His signs for you so that you may apply reason.

You may think to yourself: how can a person enter a house and then greet him or herself? We answer that God addresses the believers as a single unit, when you greet any of your brothers and sisters, you are greeting yourself and the entire Muslim community. Similarly, your blood and the blood of the entire Muslim society is one. So when Allah commands: ‘**Do not shed your blood,'** it is meant to protect you and to protect each individual from bloodshed. And when Allah continues: ‘**do not expel yourselves out from your homes**’ it is meant to protect you and every individual from harassment and harm that leads a person to leave his or her home.

The verse ends with the phrase ' **then you acknowledged it at the time, and you can testify to this.'** indicating that the Children of Israel agreed to the pledge and witnessed each other committing to it. God is also reminding the Jews living at the time of Prophet Muhammad of their forefathers' covenant when He Almighty elevated mount Toor above them. It is an open invitation to return back to God's path because many of the Children of Israel had abandoned their pledge and followed their own desires. Moreover they altered the scriptures to cover and legitimize their actions. God says:

Verse 85

Yet here you are, killing one another and driving some of your own people from their homes, helping one another in sin and aggression against them. If they come to you as captives, you still pay to set them free, although you had no right to drive them out. So do you believe in some parts of the Scripture and not in others? The punishment for those of you who do this will be nothing but disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be condemned to the harshest torment: God is not unaware of what you do. (Chapter 2: Verse 85)

This verse gives a clear account of how the Israelites broke the pledge they had willingly made. It is also a scolding for picking and choosing certain commands to follow from the Torah while rejecting others out of convenience.

This verse was revealed when a Jewish woman committed adultery in Medina. Rather than carrying out the punishment of stoning -clearly laid out in the Torah-, the Jewish leaders decided to go and seek prophet Muhammad for a ruling, hoping that it would be a lighter sentence. They were under the impression that he, peace be upon him, had no idea about the rulings found scriptures. When they presented the situation to him, he said 'you have this matter clearly laid out in the Torah.' They answered that the Torah says that we should shame the adulterers in public and throw our trash at them. They were distorting their book in front of the prophet. Prophet Muhammad answered that the Torah states that adulterers should be stoned, and advised them to carry out God's commands. The reality was: since the time of prophet Moses, the children of Israel often stalled and looked for any excuse not to follow God's orders.

The verse starts with **'Yet here you are'** meaning that even after you accepted God's pledge and beared witness to it, you started fighting and killing each other. Allah continues **'and driving some of your own people from their homes.'** Keep in mind that these two acts of killing and harassing people were clearly prohibited.

Moreover, the acts of promoting division and war were still on clear display at the time of the prophet Muhammad. When Islam began to reach Medina, and right before the Prophet's arrival from Mecca, the Arab residents of Medina were divided into two tribes: The Aus, and the Khazarj. They had constant disputes and often fought each other. There was another force driving hatred and war: it was the Jewish tribes of Medina, some aligned themselves with the Aus, while others took the side of the Khazraj. The Jews often provoked war and enmity between the two sides, as they benefited from selling both sides weapons and gained political power from the division. When they sensed that the Arab tribes may unite under the banner of the new faith of Islam, they doubled their efforts to create division.

When battles broke out between the Aus and Khazraj, many Jews lost their lives or ended up homeless in a clear violation of Allah's commands. Each supported their allies during war and fought against their Jewish brothers. However, when some of them became prisoners of war, the two Jewish groups would unite to persuade their respective Arab friends to accept a ransom and release the prisoners. Naturally, they were asked why they showed such solidarity behind the prisoners. They would say that it was obligatory in the Torah to get prisoners released. But when someone objected to their helping the non-Jews in slaughtering the

Jews, they replied that it would be a real disgrace if they did not go to the aid of their friends, even if they were not Jews.

In this verse, Allah revealed their behaviour and motives, and called it what it truly is: **'sin and aggression.' It should serve as a reminder to all of us to take our pledges and our Lord's commands seriously and not make a mockery of them in the name of faith.**

God had legislated taking enemy soldiers as captives out of mercy to all humanity. It eases tensions and stops bloodshed on the battlefield. When you take your enemy as a prisoner of war, you satisfy the human desire for victory and revenge without shedding blood. Moreover, there is the added benefit of exchanging prisoners for ransom. Keep in mind that Allah set strict rules for war and all its consequences. Killing is allowed only out of necessity, and to protect one's life. The Jewish tribes of Medina had violated many of these rules.

In Medina, and before the arrival of Islam, they helped their respective allies from al-Aus and al-Khazraj against each other in war and aggression. Battles and skirmishes often resulted in some Jews losing their homes, being killed, or taken captive by the other side. Once the hostilities were over, the Jewish leaders would encourage their allies to take ransom in exchange for allowing their fellow Jews -that they fought against during battle- back into their homes and families. They ignored many of God's teachings in the Torah, while practicing only what suited their desires at the time. Thus God describes their actions in assisting their enemies against their own people as '**helping one another in sin and aggression.'** and asked them the logical question ' **So do you believe in some parts of the Scripture and not in others?'** Indicating that faith was not what guided their behaviour, rather, all their actions were based on the worldly benefits they would gain at the time.

What is the punishment for selectively using God's teachings out of convenience for one's own benefit? God answers: ' **The punishment for those of you who do this will be nothing but disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be condemned to the harshest torment.'** meaning that there would be consequences in this world and more dire ones in the next. In other words, God does not postpone the punishment until the hereafter because He wants people to see that making a mockery of God's word is a serious offence. Take the example of Medina's Jewish tribes at the time of prophet Muhammad. One tribe was driven out of their homes and forced into exile; while another was

defeated after they betrayed a treaty made with the Muslims. So anyone who suffered injustice from those falsely claiming to follow God's word in the Torah, saw their oppressors being punished and humiliated. When justice is served publicly, balance is restored to life so people may know that their Lord exists.

Here you may wonder, wasn't humiliation in this world sufficient as a punishment? why would those who took God's words out of context for their own benefit be punished again in the hereafter? We answer that humiliation in this world is not enough because it was not the result of a due process (also known as Hadd.) Let's clarify this point with an example: Say for instance that you harmed your neighbour. If you undergo a proper trial and receive punishment as a Hadd, it would avert you punishment in the hereafter. If you commit adultery, and receive the punishment of stoning after a trial, this punishment would clear your sin, and you would not face any consequence in the hereafter. That's why some people, who want to relieve themselves from the burden of sin and punishment, come forward voluntarily to confess their crimes to the court.

The case of the oppressors is different. They are humiliated in this world because Allah turns events against them. This, however, does not account for their crimes and for all the sufferings of people. That is why oppressors will be punished in the hereafter with a far greater punishment. A punishment more severe than any torment afflicted by people in this world.

The last phrase in the verse says: '**And God is not unaware of what you do'** informing us that God Almighty has full knowledge of whatever happens in the world, including our deeds and the intentions behind those deeds.

Now, let's move to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 86

Such are the ones who have bought the present, worldly life in exchange for the Hereafter. So their punishment will not be reduced, nor will they be helped (Chapter 2: Verse 86)

This verse explains the great loss of those who exchange the hereafter for the worldly life. Any person whose only concerns are the whims and desires in the world has made him or herself a bad deal. Take a moment to compare your life here and now, with that in the hereafter. Which is better? Your life in this world is short even if you lived to be a 110. Do not get deluded by the fact that the world has existed for millions of years, and may continue to exist for millions more. The only time that counts is your life from birth till death. The world comes to an end at the moment of death. Hence, Islam taught us not to consider this world as our objective, because it is ever changing and unpredictable. Death can occur in the womb, and hour after birth, during teen years, adulthood or old age. Life in the hereafter has everlasting bliss, security and predictability. So, which life is more valuable? which one deserves your attention, planning and sacrifice? God says:

The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew. (29:64)

Unfortunately, the Jewish tribes of Medina, despite their knowledge, failed make this comparison. They discarded the hereafter in exchange for worldly material gains and temporary authority. God Almighty says describing the consequences: '**So their punishment will not be reduced, nor will they be helped**' meaning that their loss in the hereafter will be tremendous. Moreover, they will not be able to help themselves, nor will anyone come to their aid. When Allah decrees a matter, no one can change his command. The Quran quotes the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

Say, 'I have no control over any benefit for myself nor any harm except what Allah may wish. Had I known the Unseen, I would have acquired much good, and no ill would have befallen me. I am only a warner and a bearer of good news to a people who have faith.'

(07:188)

Verse 87

And we gave Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others? (Chapter 2: Verse 87)

In previous verses, God illustrated how the children of Israel treated Prophet Moses. In this verse, He describes what they did after his death.

After Moses, a number of Prophets were sent to guide the Israelites and save them from their own repeated transgressions. Here, Allah specifically mentions prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them), because Judaism and Christianity were the two main religions before Islam. Keep in mind that a number of prophets were sent to guide the Israelites before Jesus. Each time the Jewish people transgressed, strayed from God's path, and chased after worldly gains, God would bless them with a new Prophet to remind them of their faith and bring them back to the truth. Sadly, these gains were short lived, and more often than not, they turned back to defiance and disobedience. God says ' **And we gave**

Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession' explaining that He did not leave the Israelites without help, rather He supported them with the Torah and with several messengers.

The list of the Israelite prophets is long, some we know about such as David, Solomon, Jethro, Ezekiel, Elisha, Jonah, Zachariah, John, and many we don't know about (peace be upon them all). God says:

There are the Prophets that I have told you about and there are the Prophets that I have not told you about. As to Moses, God directly spoke to him.(4:164)

The Jewish people often take pride in the large number of Messengers sent to them, boasting about being God's chosen people; however, needing many messengers is a reflection not of piety, rather it is a testament to the constant transgression and indulgence in sin. Allah, after all, sends prophets when corruption is rife, and sin is common place.

Let's examine the phrase: ' **We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.**' God supported Prophet Jesus with great miracles which proved, beyond any doubt, the truthfulness of his message. Prophet Jesus was sent to a people who were immersed in materialism and tangible gains. Their hearts were far from spirituality and they did not believe in the unseen. Recall that in previous verses, they asked prophet Moses to physically see God; and when manna and quail were sent to them daily from the heavens, they feared that it would stop one day, and requested to grow their own vegetables. Such people needed a Messenger whose entire life revolved around the unseen in order to turn their hearts and minds to the Lord. Thus, Prophet Jesus' birth, death and miracles were all matters of the unseen.

Allah wants to show all of us that His abilities are not ruled by the physical and the material, rather it is He who rules the means and sets the laws. Whatever He commands 'be,' it becomes. He demonstrates this ability through all matters of creation. God says:

The kingdom of the heavens and earth belongs to Allah. He creates whatever He wills. He gives daughters to whoever He wishes; and He gives sons to whoever He wishes; or He gives them both sons and daughters; and He makes whoever He wishes barren. Truly He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful. (42:49-50)

The mating of a male and a female is the means for reproduction. But God's will and ability is above all means and causes. How many perfectly healthy couples marry, try to have children but are unable to

despite the existence of all means? Wasn't the creation of Prophet Jesus from a female only a clear display of God's ability?

The verse continues: **'and supported him with the Holy Spirit.'** The Holy spirit refers to the Archangel Gabriel. Here you may ask: Weren't all Messengers and Prophets supported by the Angel Gabriel? Why did God specify Jesus? We answer that prophet Jesus was specifically mentioned because he was accompanied by the Angel Gabriel continually from the moment of conception till the time of death. He, unlike any other human being, was conceived through the breath of the Archangel and he was born without a father. Thus, he faced constant hostilities and accusations from many people. God Almighty kept the Holy Spirit in his company at all times for protection, support, and to aid him in all his miracles. It was also through the archangel Gabriel that Jesus (peace be upon him) was raised to the heavens.

This matter is where many scholars differ in opinion. Did Jesus (peace be upon him) ascend to heaven alive or dead? Whatever the case may have been, it should make no difference to our faith. Some people argue that it is unlikely for a human to be raised alive to the heavens. We answer with a question: Was Jesus' birth like any other human? Of course not. He was born to a virgin mother. So, it should be no surprise to us if his death is also unusual. Keep in mind that prophet Jesus is not disassociated from death. He is to die like every other human.

Our beloved prophet Muhammad ascended to the heavens during the night journey (Me'raj), and spent a good part of the night there before descending back to earth. Similarly, prophet Jesus ascended to the heavens to return at the end of times and spend the rest of his life on earth. The only difference between the two events is the duration of stay in the heavens. Prophet Muhammad returned after one night, while prophet Jesus will return before the day of resurrection.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "By He, in whose hands my soul rests, Jesus the Son of Mary is to descend amongst you as a just ruler. He will shatter the cross, slaughter the pig, and abolish Jizya. Wealth will be so abundant that no one will need it."

Prophet Jesus was sent as a guidance and an example for the children of Israel. God says:

Surely he was not other than a servant, whom We favoured, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel (43:59)

Allah gave Jesus clear miracles to authenticate his prophethood, such as the ability to heal the bind, and the ability to resurrect the dead through God's will. These miracles were of two types clarified in the following verse:

And a Messenger to the Children of Israel: 'Assuredly, I have come to you with a clear proof from your Lord: I fashion for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird, then I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's permission. And I heal the blind from birth and the leper, and I revive the dead, by God's permission. And I inform you of what things you eat, and what you store up in your houses. Surely in this is a clear proof for you, if you are sincere believers (03:49)

We can understand that Allah granted Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) two types of miracles. The first type were abilities given to Jesus so he is able to perform certain miracles by himself, such as knowing what people had just eaten and what they store and hide in their houses. The second type of miracles were those that were not inherent to Jesus, rather they required God's direct permission and power every single time. Miracles like the resurrection of the dead, and breathing life into objects. These miracles could not be done without God's will and cannot be exclusively attributed to the Prophet Jesus.

We mentioned earlier that every Prophet was supported by the Holy Spirit which is the Archangel Gabriel. But prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) had Gabriel's support and presence at all times. The word 'Holy' means absolute purity. Let's take a few moments to look into the meaning of the word 'Spirit'. A spirit is what gives us life, meaning, and purpose. The soul inside your body is referred to as a spirit, because it gives your body life and purpose. Without your soul, you would be dead. Allah also refers to the Quran as a spirit, because it gives our lives meaning, purpose and direction. Without the guiding light of the Quran, life would be useless. God says:

So We have revealed a spirit to you by Our command: you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith, but We made it a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our servants. Truly you give guidance to the straight path (42:52)

The Quran is a spirit, and whoever ignores God's teachings leads a life without values.

The verse continues: '**So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings**

you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others?' The verb '**like**' is translated from the Arabic origin 'hawa' which refers to personal whims and desires and also indicates decline and loss.

The Israelites assumed themselves to be lawmakers in no need for any heavenly guidance. They often set laws according to their whims and what benefited them at that moment. Thus whenever a Messenger brought them God’s teachings, they viewed it as a great inconvenience. They often disbelieved and on many occasions killed the prophets. Prophet Muhammad warned us from acting the same way. He (peace be upon him) said: 'My example and your example is that of a person sitting around a fire. He sees insects and moths falling into the fire, and he would make every effort to save them from it. I am holding you back from fire, but you are slipping from my hands.'

Many of us frantically chase our desires and the allure of this world; and prophet Muhammad is trying to save us from ourselves and redirect us towards the hereafter. God says:

O you who believe! Respond to God and to the Messenger when the Messenger calls you to that which gives you life; and know well that surely God intervenes between a person and his heart; and that He it is to Whom you will be gathered.(8:24)

God calls those who reject His messengers '**arrogant**' indicating that they falsely regard themselves high above the prophet's guidance and claim that they do not need any help. Take a moment to ask yourself: Is your status (or anyone's status) equal to God who sets life's laws? Definitely not. Then how can any of us act arrogantly towards God's teachings?

When prophets came to the Israelites carrying God's teachings, they were faced with great hostilities. God says: ' **you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others.'** The Messengers were accused of lying, not because they were untruthful, but because their message was not convenient for the Israelites at the time. Sadly, on several occasions things went further than calling them liars, and God's prophets were murdered. This shows moral bankruptcy and weakness. When you kill someone for their ideas, it means that you cannot face them intellectually, you do not have better ideas, and you cannot handle the truth, so your only option is to kill them and try to silence their ideas for good.

Verse 88

And they said, "Our hearts are encased." No indeed, Allah has cursed them for their disbelief; so, little do they believe. (Chapter 2: Verse 88)

In this verse, God is informing us how the Children of Israel justified their repeated transgressions, and killing their Prophets. The phrase they used: **‘Our hearts are encased’** carries two meanings. First, it can be used to take pride in one's own beliefs while rejecting any other points of view. In other words, our hearts are encased means that we have sufficient knowledge, and enough faith that we do not need any advice or help from a new prophet. Second, the phrase is often used as an excuse to blame God for sealing our hearts and preventing the rays of guidance from reaching us. In other words, our hearts are encased means that we cannot help our actions because God destined us to disbelief.

Let's take a moment to answer these claims: If you say that God had encased your heart and destined you to disbelief, wouldn't you ask yourself why? What is the reason? Allah provides us with the answer; He says: '**No indeed, Allah has cursed them for their disbelief; so, little do they believe.'** The phrase **'No indeed**' confirms that their statement is untrue, and what would follow is the truth. God is refuting that they have enough knowledge in their hearts, and He is also refuting their claim that He encased their hearts. The fact is: God had cursed them and banished the from His mercy. This did not happen for no reason. It was a direct response to their deeds. God deprived them of His mercy because when guidance came to them time and again, they denied it and insisted on disbelief. They were not cursed from the beginning, they had actually earned God's anger.

Some people try to dissociate themselves from the responsibility of faith and deed, and blame God for their disbelief. They use verses like this one for evidence:

What about those whose evil deeds are made alluring to them so that they think they are good? God leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will. Do not waste your soul away with regret for them: God knows exactly what they do. (35:08)

The disbelievers think that the phrase ' **God leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will**' will save them from hell-fire on the day of resurrection because God is responsible for misguiding them. They claim that since God had willed them to disbelief, what were they to do? We answer that a person who blames God for a choice that he or she made has not studied the Quran. Let's look at the following verses:

That is because they preferred the worldly life over the Hereafter and that God does not guide the disbelieving people. (16:107)

And in another verse:

Abraham said, "So indeed it is Allah Who brings the sun from the East - you bring it from the West!" - the disbeliever was therefore baffled; and Allah does not guide the unjust. (2:258)

And lastly,

Say, 'If your fathers, sons, brothers, wives, tribes, the wealth you have acquired, the trade which you fear will decline, and the dwellings you love are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and the struggle in His cause, then wait until God brings about His punishment.' God does not guide those who are corrupt. (9:24)

These verses clearly highlight the three groups of people who do not receive God's guidance: the disbelievers, the corrupt and the unjust. Allah sent His messengers, His scriptures and His guidance to all mankind. Moreover, He created the universe and subjected it to our service, so each one of us may ponder the creation. Sadly, many people opposed God, refused to listen to His Messengers, followed their own desires, and took the beauty of creation for granted. The truth is: Allah had blessed humanity with His guidance, and provided all of us with countless bounties. He came forth with love and mercy. Those who responded to this love with denial, and chose disbelief earned themselves God's curse. In response, He sealed their hearts and left them for what they chose.

Allah made His message clear to all humanity. So if you choose to oppresses others, rob them of their rights and cheat them, then God will seal your heart. Likewise, if you indulge in sin and rush towards all that God prohibited, then God will deprive you of His mercy. Allah does not force yon towards guidance. He is the one who granted you free will. Keep in mind that God Almighty has demonstrated to you that He can have absolute power over you if He so wills. Take the examples of your internal organs; they operate completely outside your will. Your heart, blood circulation, kidneys and liver are subjected to God's will. Likewise, the calamities that may happen to you are out of your control. You cannot prevent disease, a car crash or a rock from falling on you.

Allah gave you full control over one area of your life: your choices and actions. Are going to use these great gifts to practice God's teachings? This freedom is what you and I will be responsible for on the day of resurrection. If you choose disbelief for yourself, God does not force you to believe; rather, He informs you of the consequences. If you want to benefit from God's guidance then you have to play by the rules. God informed you that He does not guide the disbelievers, the unjust and the corrupt. If you do not intend guidance for yourself, then feel free to discard God's rules.

This brings us back to the verse: when the children of Israel claimed that God had placed a seal on their hearts, God answered that they were the ones who selected this path. He said "**No indeed, Allah has cursed them for their disbelief'**

Being cursed means being expelled from God's mercy, and only God can make this happen. He banished them from His mercy due to their disbelief. God does not chase after those who deny Him. Nor does He want His messengers to fatigue themselves trying to get people to accept faith. The Messengers' duty is to convey the message and inform people that judgment in the hereafter will be just, and will be based on their choices and actions. God says:

You may perhaps wear out your heart because they do not come to belief. If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility. (26:3-4)

Allah wants you to freely turn to Him out of love. He does not benefit from your faith and deeds; the benefits and rewards will be for you alone. Whether you have faith in your heart or not does not affect His Being. Allah is self sufficient. He says:

God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him, the Almighty, the All Wise. (3:18)

Faith in Allah is your personal treasure on the day of resurrection; it will be your salvation on that terrible day.

Verse 89

Now that God has sent them this Book, which confirms their Scriptures, they deny it! even though before that they were praying for victory over the disbelievers, Yet when it was sent to them, they recognized it and chose to disbelieve in it! The disbelievers are cursed by God. (Chapter 2: Verse 89)

The Israelites had used several excuses for their rejection -and even killing- of prophets. One excuse we discussed in the previous verse was the false claim that their hearts were sealed and that they could no longer receive new guidance from God after the Torah. In this verse God illustrates how they met the new message of Islam with denial. God says: **'Now that God has sent them this Book, which confirms their Scriptures, they deny it!'** indicating that the Quran's teachings matched those in the Torah, the book the Israelites claimed to follow. In fact, the

Jewish tribes of Medina used to tell its Arab residents that a new prophet and a new divine book was soon to come. They proclaimed their belief in the new Prophet and the new book even before their arrival. They went a step further and declared themselves ready to lay their lives for the new cause against the disbelievers. Islam arrived shortly after.......the Quran confirmed the teachings of the Torah, and resolved many issues that were not clear Israelites as the following verses illustrate:

We sent to you the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.(5:48)

and in another verse:

Truly, this Quran explains to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about (27:76)

So, how did the Jewish tribes of Medina treat this new message? How did they react when the truth they were eagerly awaiting came exactly as they described? Sadly, they rushed to disbelief and supported those fighting against Islam.

Interestingly, the defiance of the Jewish tribes of Medina was one of the main reasons Prophet Muhammad(peace be upon him) received a large following and a solid support in Medina. Let's clarify this point: For years before the prophet, the Aus and the Khazraj heard the Israelites boast about the coming of a new prophet. They made his description famous, and the signs of his truthfulness known. As a result, when the Aus and Khazraj heard about a person named Muhammad in Mecca, they quickly recognised him as God's promised messenger.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to travel to Ta'if to invite people to Islam but they showed nothing but hostility. Likewise, in Mecca, he waited for the hajj season and used this opportunity to invite the pilgrims to God. Again, this effort was mostly fruitless as many Meccans fought him because they did not want any distraction from the best trade season of the year. This all changed, however, when two tribes: the Aus and the Khazraj came to Mecca seeking out the prophet. He did not go to them, nor did he have a chance to tell them about Islam.

They came willingly, accepted faith, pledged allegiance to Muhammad and promised to spread his teachings. Then they asked him to migrate to Medina, the new home of Islam, and live amongst them. Allah, through His knowledge and mercy, used the defiance and hypocrisy of the Jewish tribes of Medina to spread the news about prophet Muhammad even before his arrival.

The logical question to ask is: Why would the Israelites reject exactly what they were looking forward to? God gives us the answer in the next verse: He says:

Verse 90

What an evil thing they have sold themselves for in rejecting what Allah has sent down, outraged that Allah should send down His favour on whomever He wills of His servants. They have brought down anger upon anger on themselves; and there is a humiliating punishment for the faithless. (chapter 2: Verse 90)

The verse starts with '**What an evil thing they have sold themselves for.'** In normal trade you pay money to purchase an item. Suppose, however, that you urgently need medicine but have no money, what would you do? In this case you would look for anything valuable you

have -such as your watch or jewellery- in order to exchange it for medicine. Your watch or jewellery becomes the price you pay for medicine. This was the case that faced every person who was invited to join the new faith of Islam. He or she could temporarily sell worldly desires in exchange for believing in the message of Muhammad. In the hereafter, this person would earn paradise and everlasting bliss. It is a very profitable deal: exchange what is temporary and unpredictable, with what is permanent and blissful.

Sadly, as this verse mentions, many people made the opposite deal. They bought disbelief and temporary worldly freedom in exchange for salvation. It is truly a huge loss. Not only did they earn disgrace and humiliation in this world, but they will also suffer great punishment in the hereafter. God says describing this transaction: ' **What an evil thing they have sold themselves for in rejecting what Allah has sent down.'**

When an oppressor is punished in this world, it helps to restore balance to life, and presents an opportunity for others to learn a lesson. God says:

There is life for you in retribution, O people of intellect, so that you may take heed. (02:179)

God applies His law and retribution to the wrongdoer whether he or she is a believer or a disbeliever. We see the example of how those who engage in interest and predatory lending often end up penniless or fearing for their safety. We see the example of how those who falsely imprison and torture people often end up tortured by a debilitating disease or by the loss of loved ones. The word about the demise of an oppressor is quick to spread through the news or social media. Each incident presents an important lesson for you and I. We supplicate Allah to guide all humanity to his path, and to seize those who make a habit of robbing people of their rights and spreading corruption in the land.

Let's look at an example that happened during the time of the prophet: Most of the eminent people and renowned businessmen of Medina were from its Jewish residents. However, because of the widespread corruption and the war conflicts they caused, they ended up forced out of their homes...........their wealth was taken from them and their families fell apart.

Allah sets limits and boundaries for everything in life. Whomever willingly and repeatedly transgresses over God's limits is bound to face consequences. The limits Allah laid out for our behaviour are His

commandments. We ought to respect them and adhere to them. Sometimes these limits are commands to follow and sometimes they are prohibitions to avoid. Hence, God says in the 229th verse of the cow:

These are the bounds set by God: do not overstep them. It is those who overstep God's bounds who are doing wrong. (02:229)

And in another verse:

You are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are as garments to you, as you are to them. God was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them- seek what God has ordained for you- eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong. (02:187)

Here we should ask: What was the limit set by God that the Israelites violated in Medina? Why did they transgress against the prophet and the book they were eagerly awaiting? God provides the answer: It is because they were '**outraged that Allah should send down His favour on whomever He wills of His servants. '** In other words, they were jealous of Muhammad because Allah chose him to be a prophet from amongst the Arabs. They always assumed that they -the Israelites- were the seed of God's religion on earth. After all, there were countless Prophets sent from among the Israelites. Thus, when the Torah and the Gospel gave glad tidings of the last Prophet, they automatically assumed him to be from amongst themselves. They declared their belief and support even before his arrival. But then, they were taken by surprise when God sent Muhammad -an Arab- as His final messenger to humanity. The feelings of jealousy and arrogance overcame them...........they lost their faith to pride.

Allah is the most knowledgeable, the most wise. He knows best where to put His message. The Israelites were deprived from apostleship because they were no longer worthy of it. Allah says:

if He wills, He can do away with you and bring in a new creation, and that is not difficult for God. (35:16-17)

God tested the Jewish people several times. He gave them many chances, and blessed them with a precession of Prophets and Messengers. On

many occasions, they faced their prophets with denial, mischief and, in some instances, murder. The result of repeatedly violating God's boundaries was that they were deprived of the great bounty of prophethood.

Similarly, you should always think about any talent you may have, any material possessions, any physical or mental gift as a great bounty from your Lord. None of these things are inherent to you. Everything is subjected to God's will. Take the example of great athletes or world champions who are on top of their game. Their talent and perfection is not going to last forever because an opponent will inevitably come to unseat them. On many occasions, top athletes get caught up in addictions, or get involved in an accident making them unfit to compete. You should always attribute any gift or accomplishment to your Lord first. It is a grant from Allah that you nourish through your effort and hard work. Just like anything in life, it is subject to God's will. Perfection and permanence belong to Allah alone.

Allah is presenting us with the story of the Children of Israel because they were the last people entrusted with the heavenly message prior to Islam. They lost this trust through repeated violations of God's commands. Are you taking time to learn the lessons of these verses of 'The Cow'? Are you learning from the mistakes of others? or are we -as Muslims- violating God's commands and repeating the same mistakes as those before us, and?

The Jews were jealous of Muhammad (peace be upon him). They were resentful that the Quran descended upon an Arab, so they fought against it although they had no issue with its message. Thus, God teaches us that they deserved His wrath.....He says: ' **They have brought down anger upon anger on themselves**' meaning they had earned God anger first for not practicing what was in the Torah, and second for questioning God's wisdom of granting prophethood to Muhammad.

What is the result of dispensing with God's teachings? Allah answers **'and there is a humiliating punishment for the faithless.'** Punishment in the Quran is described using a few different adjectives such as: painful, great and humiliating. Let's look into the meaning of ' **humiliating punishment.'** When a person is punished, he or she tries to act tough and tries to show that he or she is not affected by the pain. In the hereafter, God Almighty will punish those without faith with a punishment so severe that it will be unbearable; so no one will be able to act as though he or she is not feeling any pain. God says:

We shall seize out of each group those who were most defiant against the Lord of Mercy. Indeed, We know best who deserves most to be thrown into Hell to roast. (19:69-70)

and in another chapter:

We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between; We created them for a true purpose, but most people do not comprehend. The Day of Judgment is the time appointed for all; The day when friend will help no friend in the least, nor will they be helped, except for those Allah has mercy on. He is the Almighty, the Most Merciful. The tree of Zaqqum will indeed be food for the sinners: seething in the belly like molten brass, like the boiling of hot water. 'Take him! Drag him into the depths of Hell! then pour over his head the punishment of boiling water.' 'Taste this, you powerful, respected man! This is certainly what you had denied." (44:38-50)

Verse 91

And when they are told: "Believe in that which He has sent down," they retort: "We believe in only what was sent down on us," and they disbelieve in what is beyond that, though it is the truth, confirming what they already possess. Say: "Why then did you kill the Prophets of God before, if indeed you are believers?" (Chapter 2: Verse 91)

This verse illustrates the hostilities prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) faced when he invited the Jewish residents of Arabia to faith. They refused to believe in him although they were given good tidings of his arrival in the Torah. Their answer was: **"We believe in only what was sent down on us."** Take note that they did not say that Muhammad's teachings contradicted the Torah, nor did they claim that Islam came to destroy or abolish their religion. In fact, they did not oppose the teachings of the Quran, rather, their true opposition was that it was not revealed to one of them.

The evidence against their claim that they only want to uphold the Torah is strong. As we discussed earlier, the history of the Israelites is rich in events where they denied or even killed their prophets. To murder a prophet is tantamount to infidelity according to all divine books. More importantly, the Prophets whom the Israelites killed were themselves Israelites, and their teachings were based on the Torah. Hence, Allah taught His messenger Muhammad to answer them with this question: **Say: "Why then did you kill the Prophets of God before, if indeed you are believers?"**

Here we should pause and look into the meaning of the word '**before.**' Allah wanted to reassure Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that the killing of Prophets has come to an end. The phrase ' **Why then did you kill the Prophets of God before** ' gives comfort to the believers that this will not happen again. In fact, the events following the revelation of this verse supported God's word. There were several plots to kill Muhammad....from throwing large rocks on him, to serving him poisoned meat......none of them succeeded.

Let's continue to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

Verse 92

And Moses had certainly brought you clear proofs. Then you took the calf for worship after that, while you were wrongdoers. (Chapter 2: Verse 92)

Allah continues to refute the Israelite's claim that they rejected Muhammad's message because they only believe in that which was sent to them.

This verse clarifies that disbelief has been in their nature since the time of prophet Moses. God says addressing the children of Israel: '**And Moses had certainly brought you clear proofs'.** Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) was blessed with numerous miracles which were sufficient for your hearts to have unshakable faith in Allah. He split the sea to save you from pharaoh's torment. He gave you springs of water and fed you the best of foods in the barren dessert. You witnessed the resurrection of a murdered man when he was hit with a part of a slaughtered cow. Despite all that, as soon as Moses left for a few days, you rushed to worship a golden calf. Doesn't all that go against your claim that you only believe in what was revealed to you? All evidence suggests otherwise, which makes your argument unacceptable. All scriptures prohibit the killing of Prophets, and prohibit the worship of anything, or anyone, but God.

The fact is: many of the children of Israel showed little belief in what was revealed to them, and even less in what was revealed after that. Thus, came God's answer in the previous verse: **" and they disbelieve in what is beyond that, though it is the truth, confirming what they already possess.'**

The verse ends with '**Then you took the calf for worship after that, while you were wrongdoers.'** A calf is one of God's bounties. It is a subservient animal that can be utilized to help in cultivation, used for milk, or slaughtered for food and leather. But when it is idolized or worshipped it becomes a sin. In fact, it is such a great wrongdoing and transgression, that when God reprimands the children of Israel about rejecting the message of Islam, he reminds them of the terrible sin their forefather committed against their faith.

Verse 93

Remember when We took your pledge, making the mountain tower above you, and said, ‘Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen.’ They said, ‘We hear' and we disobey, and through their disbelief they were made to drink the calf deep into their hearts. Say, ‘If you are believers, what an evil thing your faith has made you do.’

(Chapter 2:Verse 93)

In the previous verses, God reprimanded the Israelites for abandoning their faith and scriptures. He reminded them that despite the miracles of prophet Moses, and countless bounties, they worshipped a calf soon after. This was not because they were over burdened or short on opportunities. As this verse explains, Allah gave them many chances and went to great lengths to guide them to the straight path.

After the Israelites neglected God's bounties and miracles, He raised mount Toor above their heads asking them to adhere to His teachings and scriptures. They accepted and pledged to abide by the torah, not out of faith, rather out of fear. Allah does not force or coerce anyone into belief. Rather, it was out of love and mercy for the Israelites that He raised the

mountain above them. Let's clarify this point with an example. If your young child is sick and needs a terrible tasting medicine to feel better, what would you do? Would you try to entice him or her with a toy or a sweet treat? If all fails, would you pressure your child with a scolding? You would do all of this out of compassion and love because your child's health is very important. Similarly, Allah enticed the Israelites towards faith with bounties and miracles, and when that failed He used fear because He does not want His creation to go astray and live without heavenly guidance. When mount Toor was raised above the heads of the Israelites, they saw God's power and ability, hence they believed. God wants them to know that He did not spare any means to encourage them to adhere to faith, but it was their arrogance and stubbornness that led them astray.

Let's examine the phrase '**your pledge.**' Was it God's pledge or the Israelites'? It is God's covenant, but in this verse He attributed to the Israelites because they took part in it. A covenant or a promise requires two parties to agree. The children of Israel followed prophet Moses out of their free will. When they started to break away from their covenant, God blessed them with miracles and then raised mount Toor above them to bring them back to the deal they made. Allah is merciful and compassionate with his servants. When He sees them disobeying, He warns them and may even cast fear into their heart so they may return to the right path. Mont Toor remained above the heads of the Israelites only for a few minutes. Thus, one cannot conclude that they were forced to take the pledge because as soon as the miracle ended they had the choice to do whatever they saw fit.

The Israelites were very materialistic people, and their hearts were attached to the tangible. Thus, it is interesting to note that Allah used this point to attract them towards faith. The miracles God granted prophet Moses were all magnificent material miracles, because they had the best chance to influence and soften the hearts of the Israelites. Take the examples of parting the sea, providing top quality foods of mana and quail, and raising mount Toor.

The verse continues with '**Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen.'** God wanted the Israelites to receive His teachings with love and devotion. We usually protect and hang on to the things we love. If you truly love Allah, you would hold His teachings dear, and try to perform then to the best of your ability and that is how God wanted the Israelites to receive the Torah.

The same applies to listening. You listen attentively to the ones you

love......you don't just hear them and disregard what they say. What was the Israelites response to God's invitation to '**Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen'?** The response came in two parts. First: they said with their tongues **'we hear.'** But the louder response came through their actions as illustrated by the phrase **'and disobey.'** In other words, they heard with their ears what God said to them, and then disobeyed in their actions. Allah wants you to listen in order to learn, act on and benefit from His word. Allah speaks to you, so you would be active applying His teachings. In fact, if you hear God, but do not act upon the Quran, your inaction becomes a sin.

'**and through their disbelief they were made to drink the calf deep into their hearts.**' This phrase paints a picture for us. Love is intangible, it is a spiritual matter, not a materialistic one. Thus, the expression should have logically been '**they were made to drink the love of the calf deep into their hearts.**' However, God wanted to tell us that their love for the calf was so intense as if the calf itself had entered into their hearts. We get another view of this picture through God's choice of the verb '**drink.**' When you drink water, it goes through your entire body to become a part of your being. Likewise, the love of the material and the tangible had penetrated into the hearts of the Israelites to the extent that it became part of their being.

How did this happen, you may ask? It was ' **through their disbelief.'** As if disbelief was the cup that served them the love of the calf. Here again we should note that the actions of the Israelites preceded God' actions. They disbelieved first, and because of this disbelief, the love of the calf entered their hearts and was sealed in.

Allah ends the verse with the following phrase: **Say, 'If you are believers, what an evil thing your faith has made you do.'** This is a direct answer to the Israelite's claim in the 91st verse when they said **'"We believe in only what was sent down on us."** Dose the Jewish faith command denying God's prophets and breaking His covenant? of course not. Rather, their faith commands them of all that is good and righteous as the following verses illustrate:

Grant us good things in this world and in the life to come. We turn to You.' God said, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. 'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the Messenger- the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- who commands them to do right and forbids them to do

wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the shackles that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed.' (07:156-157)

Allah is fully aware of all the good and all the righteous commands He gave the Israelites. This is why when they try to deceive God, and contradict His teachings He scorns them and says: "**'If you are believers, what an evil thing your faith has made you do.'** It is an expression full of irony and mockery. The people of Moses were not true believers. They had the love of the calf in their hearts.

Verse 94

Say: "If the abode of the Hereafter with God is reserved for you alone, excluding other people, then long for death, if you are sincere and truthful in your claim."

(Chapter 2:Verse 94)

This verse presents a true test for the children of Israel. In the previous verses, we learned that some had altered the scriptures in exchange for worldly gain, while others denied and even killed God's prophets. These acts were done, not out of ignorance, carelessness, or because they fell prey to deception, rather they were committed with careful planning. They are well aware that verses were fabricated and falsely attributed to God. Therefore, Allah instructed prophet Muhammad to challenge them.

The verse opens with the command '**say**' addressing Muhammad (peace

be upon him). The phrase ‘**If the abode of the Hereafter with God is reserved for you alone**’ is a direct response to their claim that paradise in the hereafter with God is exclusively for them. The word '**reserved**' is translated from the Arabic origin ‘**Khalis**’ which means something pure, exclusive, and free of any sharing. Usually, if something is reserved exclusively for you, you would really look forward to getting and enjoying it. Similarly, if the Israelites claim that they alone will earn God's pleasure and paradise in the hereafter, then they should be living an ascetic life, disregarding any worldly greed, and looking forward to the hereafter. They, after all, claim to be guaranteed paradise. Why would you want to fight over the temporary pleasures and authority of this world? Wouldn't you long to meet your Lord and look forward to death? The Israelites were the ones claiming to be assured paradise as the following verse illustrates:

They say that none will enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian. That is their own wishful thinking. Say: "Produce your proof if you are truthful!" (02:111)

They claim that no one will enter paradise unless he or she is of the Jewish faith. Christians also made a similar claim. Both parties claimed heaven exclusively for them. These two contradicting statements should lead any person to wonder: who is right? Which of them will enter paradise, the Jews or the Christians? Allah gives us the truth in the following verse:

The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences. (02:113)

Here is the most accurate and factual statement each party made regarding the other: when it comes to who will earn paradise, Christians have no true claim to stand on and the Jews have nothing to stand on either. No one can judge people's faith or deed except Allah. He, the just and the merciful, will determine your fate, my fate and everyone else's. This brings us back to the verse: the claim that the hereafter belongs to the Jews is a false fabrication. God provides further proof in the following verse:

The Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of God and His beloved ones.’ Say, ‘Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives

whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him; and to Him is the return.' (05:18)

There are some people -even to this day- who assume that no matter how they behave, God will never punish them on the day of resurrection. Moreover, they feel assured that they will earn His mercy and paradise simply because they belong to a certain faith. But God's justice is free from such inequity. How can He forgive a group while He punishes others for the same exact wrongdoings? How can Allah specify paradise for one group regardless of their deeds? He Almighty says:

God said, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. 'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the Messenger- the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the shackles that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed.' (07:156-157)

Verse 95

But they will never wish for it, ever, because of what their hands have put forth. And God is Knowing of the wrongdoers. (Chapter 2:Verse 95)

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, faced much hostilities from the Jewish leaders in Medina who claimed that they had more than sufficient guidance from God, and were in no need of new heavenly teachings. They went as far as to claim that they are guaranteed paradise, exclusive to their faith. In the previous verse, God taught prophet Muhammad to challenge those who claim that they are guaranteed God's mercy and paradise in the hereafter.

Say: "If the abode of the Hereafter with God is reserved for you alone, excluding other people, then long for death, if you are sincere and truthful in your claim." (2:94)

In the verse under study, Allah gives us the true answer to that challenge: Anyone who knowingly and repeatedly transgresses against God's teachings, has true fear of death and of meeting his or her Lord on the day of judgment. Keep in mind that Allah revealed this verse before the prophet had a chance to confront those who opposed him. In other words, God, with all His knowledge and wisdom, knew beforehand exactly what their responses and actions were going to be. The Jewish leaders who opposed and fought the prophet will never look forward to death because they truly fear it. They know that they had altered God's word and changed the scriptures.

This also means that when prophet Muhammad challenged them, he gave them a golden opportunity to discredit the Quran. They could have accepted the challenge and wished for death, even out of hypocrisy and mockery. They had the chance to create doubt about Muhammad's message. Because God had predicted that they would never look forward to death, all they would have had to say was: ‘O Muhammad, invoke your Lord to give us death.’ But they could not bring themselves to do that. God, who has the best knowledge of His creation, had already concluded that they would not.

Let's look at another example in the Quran, where Allah predetermined the outcome and behaviour of those who opposed His message. God says:

The foolish people will say, ‘What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?’ Say, ‘East and West belong to God. He guides whoever He will to the right way.’ (02:142)

This verse quotes the statement of the disbelievers before they even said

it. The verb '**will**' points to future actions. Moreover, God described those who will say this as fools. All the disbelievers had to do when they learned that the Muslims changed the direction of their prayer -Qibla- was to remain silent. If they had remained silent, they could have discredited the Quran. They, however, could not help themselves. The disbelievers said exactly what the Quran had predicted. The thought of not saying anything did not even occur to them. Thus, the label of 'fools' is a perfect description for them. Allah is indeed best aware and has full knowledge of His creation.

Similarly, if the Israelites were true in their claim of guaranteed paradise, they would have wished for death so that they may be transferred to the world of ever-lasting bliss. But God had already determined that this will never occur. Each one of us knows the true nature of our deeds, and the Israelites knew the terrible sins they committed.

Ammar ibn Yaser (may God be pleased with him) was one of the ten companions of Prophet Muhammad who were given glad tidings of paradise. Let's see how he faced death. In the battle of Hunain, after he was mortally wounded, he was heard chanting: 'now I will meet the beloved ones; Muhammad and his companions'. Ammar was content and tranquil, because he was certain that he will be with his loved ones in paradise. One can only be in such a state if he is assured paradise and its pleasures.

In another example, in the battle of Hunain, imam Ali (may God be pleased with him) was wearing a very light armour, which barely provided protection. His son Hasan approached him and said: father, this is not the attire of war. Ali replied: My son, your father does not care whether he tumbles upon death or whether death tumbles upon him.

And lastly, during the battle of Badr, one of the companions asked the prophet (peace be upon him): O Messenger of God, Is all that is between me and paradise that I fight these people and be killed? The prophet replied: yes. The companion discarded some food that was in his hands -as if it was a distraction from his true goal-, and fought the enemies tirelessly. He was honoured with martyrdom on the battle field.

These were some examples of people who were certain about the hereafter when they faced death.

Here we should question whether expressing the desire for something is done by the tongue or the heart? Maybe the Israelites had wished for death in their heart when the prophet challenged them. We answer that Allah knows what we say, and what we keep to ourselves. If the

Israelites had wished for death within their hearts, God would have known it and He would have granted their wish. But He had already informed us, and them, that they will never wish for it neither with their tongues nor their hearts. Their claim that the hereafter is exclusive for them is similar to their previous false claims they made in the following verse:

They say, 'The Fire will only touch us for a few days.' Say to them, 'Have you received a promise from God- for God never breaks His promise- or are you saying things about Him of which you have no real knowledge?' (02:80)

Why are they running away from the hereafter? God answers '**Because of what their hands have put forth.'** In other words, it is their own sins that truly frighten them from death. Contrast that to a person who had done righteous deeds, and did not wrong people, he or she faces death in peace. Take the example of a situation, such as a terminal illness with no hope of recovery, where a person becomes aware that he or she will die soon. Here, you often see the difference between the one who did pious deeds and the one who wasted his or her life. Each will face death according to his or her actions. More telling, however, is at the moment of death. As the soul is departing the body, God reveals to the dying person his or her destiny. God says:

Indeed you were in heedlessness of this, and now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp. (50:22)

The face of the righteous person will shine as the hope and joy of eternal pleasure comes near. He or she is received by the angels of mercy. At the moment of death, any chance of repentance is lost. So, if a person is burdened by evil deeds or disbelief, he or she will be greeted by the angels of punishment and shown hellfire as the final destination. Thus, the dying person's face will show stress and misery. As for the one who lived life mindful of the Lord, he or she longs for the moment of their meeting.

Here we should note an important point the Prophet warned us about. He, peace be upon him, said: 'No one of you should wish for death or ask for it before it approaches him unless he is certain of his deeds.' In other words, you should not wish for death out of fear of the future, nor out of despair of your current problems. Rather, you should try your best to be patient over what God has destined for you. When you despair, it is a sign that you cannot bring yourself to bear what God has chosen for you, and you want to rebel against His wisdom. In this situation, it is

prohibited to ask for death. If, on the other hand, you have done good deeds, and you feel at peace with yourself, then you can look forward to meeting your Lord as the following verse narrates about prophet Joseph:

My Lord! You have given me authority; You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.' (12:101)

Verse 96

You are sure to find them clinging to a life, more eagerly than any other people even the polytheists. Any of them would wish to be given a life of a thousand years, though even such a long life would not save them from the torment: God sees everything they do. (Chapter 2:Verse 96)

In the previous verse, God challenged the children of Israel against their claim that paradise and the hereafter belongs exclusively to them. He urged them to prove it by wishing for death, and informed us that none of them would. They are afraid of death because of the sins they committed. This verse completes the picture, showing the greed they have for this worldly life; Greed that surpasses that of the non-believers. Let's clarify this point further. A non-believer clings to life because it is the only objective; in his or her view there is nothing afterwards, and no reward or

punishment to worry about. Why would the Israelites cling even more to life? because they are aware of the rewards and punishment, and fear death for the evil deeds they committed. Take note that God used the indefinite phrase **'clinging to *a* life,'** rather than a specific expression such as '*the* life,' or *'a good* life' indicating their greed is for life under any circumstances even in humiliations and poverty.

The verse continues: '**Any of them would wish to be given a life of a thousand years.**' If you have committed grave sin, you would be scarred about the punishment you may face after death; thus you would wish for long life. Suppose, however, that you lived for a thousand years or more, without repenting or avoiding sin, would that avert you punishment? Never! Long life does not alter the ending. Life, after all, is not in my hand or yours, it is in the hands of Allah. He is the one who grants life, and He is the one who takes it away. God says:

Think, if we let them enjoy this life for some years, And the punishment they were promised comes upon them after that, what good would their past enjoyment be to them? (26:205-207)

and in another verse:

Say: 'Death, from which you are fleeing, will certainly catch up with you, then you will be returned to Him Who knows all the hidden and the visible - He will then inform you of what you did.' (62:8)

Here we should look at a historical detail. Why is the number 'thousand' specifically mentioned in this verse? because it was the highest numbers the Arabs knew at the time. When the sister of Khosrow, the Persian king, was taken captive in war, her captor was asked how much money he demand for her release? He replied: a thousand dirham. Later he was told that if he had demanded a larger sum, he would have got it. The man said: if I knew a larger number, I would have asked for it. That is why, the Arabs used to express a million by saying 'a thousand thousand.'

The verse ends with the phrase '**God sees everything they do**' meaning that regardless if you live a year or a hundred, God knows what you have done and He will hold your accountable for your actions.

Let's move to the next verse in 'The Cow.' God says:

Verse 97

Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - it is he who has brought the Qur'an down upon your heart, by God's permission, confirming that which was before it and as guidance and good news to the believers (Chapter 2:Verse 97)

Ibn Jurya -a Jewish rabbi- sat down with prophet Muhammad and asked ‘Who comes down to you with the revelation? The Prophet replied: The archangel Gabriel. The rabbi said: ‘If it had been someone other than Gabriel, we would have believed in you. Gabriel is our enemy, because he always comes down with punishment and ruin. The angel Michael, on the other hand, descends down with mercy, rain and harvest'.

In this verse, Allah is informing us about another sin the Israelites faced the prophet with. They hated the angels, and showed special enmity towards one of the closest angels to God: Gabriel who comes down with God’s revelations.

There was also another historical reason behind the Israelites claim of hatred towards Gabriel. During the time of the Babylonians, the Jews had a prophecy that Nebuchadnezzar -a Babylonian King- will destroy the sacred temple in Jerusalem. Thus, they sent a man to kill him. On his way to the king, this Jewish man met a child. The child asked: where are you heading? The man replied: I am going to kill Nebuchadnezzar who will destroy Jerusalem according to our prophecy. The child said: if it has been decreed that Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the holy Temple, then it is God's will and you will not be able to kill him. And if God has not decreed for him to destroy the Temple, then why would you kill an innocent man? You cannot avert what God has destined, regardless if you like it or not. The man thought about what the child had said, and decided to turn back. When he arrived to his people and told them what happened, they told him it was the Angel Gabriel who posed before you

in a child’s form and convinced you not to kill the king who will destroy our temple.

Umar ibn al-Khattab -one of the prophet's closest companions- owned land in the northern parts of Medina. When he went to check on his land, he would occasionally join some of the Jewish residents in their study of the Torah. They said to him once: we like you Umar, and would love you to be one of us. Umar replied: I do not sit with you because I want to join your faith, rather, it strengthens my faith when I find your study in perfect conformity with what my beloved prophet Muhammad had said. They asked: who informs Muhammad of our book and secrets? Umar replied: the Archangel Gabriel comes to him with the revelations from the heavens. They said: Gabriel is our enemy. Umar asked them: What is Gabriel's status in the sight of God. They said Gabriel sits on the right of God’s throne while Michael sits on the left. Umar paused, then said: If the matter is how you describe, then neither of them are enemies to each other because they hold the same high status in God’s sight. So if you hold a grudge against either of them, you are in fact an enemy of God. Your love for the angel Michael will not intercede for your hatred for the angel Gabriel, because both hold a lofty status in the sight of God. Umar told them that they are in clear contradiction with the truth, then left the gathering and headed back to see Muhammad (peace be upon him.) However, as he arrived and even before he had the chance to say a single word, the prophet said: ‘O Umar, your Lord agrees with you. He Almighty revealed the following verse: **Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - it is he who has brought the Qur'an down upon your heart, by God's permission, confirming that which was before it and as guidance and good news to the believers (2:97)** Umar said that he felt his faith as strong as a mountain on that day.

The enmity the Israelites showed towards Gabriel demonstrates how they use worldly materialistic views to judge heavenly matters. They compared the angels to humans. In other words, they viewed the angels Gabriel and Michael as people sitting on the right and left of a king. Each one is competing for the king's attention and scheming to gain his favour. However, there is no such competition between angels. Allah elevates whoever He wills in status without decreasing the status of another. Moreover, Allah is the absolute truth, and whatever Gabriel and Michael descend with from God is the absolute truth. There is but a single truth, and there is never a conflict within it.

The arch angel Gabriel brought down scriptures from God that support what is written in Torah. The Quran is a beacon of light and guidance,

and it brings glad tidings for the believers. How can anyone dislike the bearer of such priceless good?

Verse 98

Whoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His messengers and Gabriel and Michael - then indeed, Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers. (Chapter 2:Verse 98)

We discussed how the Israelites used their hatred for the Archangel Gabriel as an excuse to reject the Quran and the message of Islam. In this verse, God Almighty informs us what hatred towards His angels truly means. Hatred of the Messengers is like hatred of the angels, and hatred for any of them means hatred of God. Thus, in this verse, Allah mentions the messengers and angels altogether first, then He specifies Gabriel and Michael.

In other words, Allah wants you to know that the truth is one, with no conflict or division. Whoever is an enemy to any of the angels, or of Gabriel, Michael, or of any of God's Messengers, then he or she is in fact an enemy of God Himself. There is no difference between any of them, they all represent the truth. And when it comes to the truth, there is no room for picking and choosing. Conflicts stem from the whims and desires of people when they cherry pick what benefits them the most.

The Israelites who denied God's messengers were God's enemies because they disbelieved in the truth. Similarly, the Israelites who detested God's angel were God's enemies because they disbelieved in the truth. Allah wants to direct your attention towards the unity of truth in

religion. The source of truth is God Himself. The messenger of truth from amongst his angels is Gabriel. And the messengers of truth from amongst humans are the messengers and prophets God had sent. Note that Allah does not say that enmity towards the angels and messengers is mere hatred, rather He calls it an act of disbelief. Thus, God instructed His messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) to announce this fact to everyone so they become aware who are the disbelievers.

In contrast, listen to Allah's description of the believers in the following verse:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'-(2:285)

Now, let's move to the next verse in 'The Cow'. God says:

Verse 99

And we indeed have revealed to you clear signs, and none disbelieve in them except the rebellious (Chapter 2:Verse 99)

In this verse, Allah guides us to the shining truth embodied in Muhammad's mission and teachings. The truth God sent through the angel Gabriel and prophet Muhammad is supported with clear signs and verses that leave no room for doubt for any person who is seeking the truth. It is those who are wilfully ignorant, or intent on sin that do not believe in God's message.

What is meant by clear signs, you may ask? A sign is something clear and marvellous. These signs -translated from the Arabic word Ayat- are miracles of the prophet that prove the truthfulness of what he conveys from God. The same Arabic word (Ayat) also refers to the verses of the Nobel Quran. They are clear and evident for all to see and examine. Thus, God concludes the verse with the phrase ‘and none disbelieve in them except the rebellious.'

In order to understand the true meaning of the word 'rebellious,' we should look at the Arabic origin of the word. The word 'فَاسِقِينِ' originated from the desert environment surrounding the Arabs at the time of the prophet. While a date ripens on a palm tree, its skin stays attached to the body of the fruit and acts as a protecting barrier from the elements. As the date ages, the skin separates from the fruit making it very easy to peel. The word ' فسق' describes the detachment of the skin from its natural healthy place exposing the fruit to harm and causing it to spoil. Similarly, Allah used this word to describe a person who distances him or herself away from God’s teachings; A person who does not observe God's commandments or prohibitions, thus exposing him or herself to harm and ruin; In essence, an outlaw rebelling against faith.

The signs by which God supported Muhammad (peace be upon him) were clear even to the disbelievers. Let's look at a few examples. Muhammad was unlettered and did not have any formal education. Then, seemingly out of the blue, he -peace be upon him- brought this Quran which is miraculous both in its literature and content. Its verses were revered by the elites of the poets and the masters of the language of his time. This in by itself is a clear sign of the heavenly source of the book. Muhammad had many enemies in constant search of ways to attack and discredit the him. Yet, none of them had any issue with the Quran. To the contrary, they wished it was theirs as the following verse illustrates:

"They say, 'Why was this Qur'an not *sent down to one of the great men* of the two cities?” (43:31)

Moreover, the disbelievers tried their best to sway Muhammad away from the Quran by offering him wealth and status to no avail. This reflects that he was a principled man, not after material possessions, power, or social status, rather, he (peace be upon him) was following God's revelations to convey the heavenly teachings to humanity.

The Quran also delivered and is still revealing many secrets of creation. Muhammad, peace be upon him, informed the people of the result of a war that was to occur nine years later as the following verses foretold:

The Byzantines have been defeated, In the lands close-by, but they, after their defeat, will be victorious in a few years' time. God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice. With God's help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful. (30:2-5)

The Quran also informed the disbelievers and the hypocrites of what their hearts hold, exposing their lies. It also informed us of events yet to occur. The miraculous Quran contains scientific, astronomic and cosmic knowledge that were not scientifically proven until centuries later. All of these signs present the disbelievers with clear proofs that can only be rejected by a person who is wilfully ignorant, or chasing his or her desires. Faith in God, the Quran, the angels and the Prophets does not require but a neutral open mind, and a desire to seek the creator.

Verse 100

How is it that whenever they make a covenant or a pledge, some of them throw it away? In fact, most of them do not believe. (Chapter 2:Verse 100)

God explained that Islam and the Quran contain clear proofs making it easy for the thoughtful mind to have unshakeable faith in Allah. This makes the position of those who opposed Islam, especially the Jewish people who know the Torah, hard to understand. Their stand against Islam is in direct contradiction to their faith, and to the Torah that gave them glad tidings about the last prophet. It is in contradiction to human nature which seeks a connection with the divine, and to all of the pledges they took upon themselves. God says:

God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' They said, 'We do.' He said, 'Then bear witness and I too will bear witness.' (03:81)

God took this pledge from Moses (peace be upon him) who passed it on to his people, the children of Israel. We know that the Israelites were fully aware of this pledge because they boasted about the exact description of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) years before his arrival. Sadly, they violated their promise to God, just like the violated many previous ones.

Let's look at a few examples of these broken promises: The Israelites of the village by the sea took a pledge not to work or fish on the Sabbath. Rather than honour their word, they made a mockery of it by digging trenches and setting traps during the week so that they can catch fish easily on Saturday while they sat home. Another pledge made by Moses' people was their commitment to worship Allah alone, but they soon turned to worship the golden calf. They disregarded many of the teachings in the Torah even after they solemnly swore to abide by them when God raised Mount Toor above their heads. In Arabia, right before the time of Islam, the Jewish tribes of Medina were in constant violation of the Torah. They promoted war and division, and even killed and held captive many of their Jewish brethren against God's teachings.

This pattern continued during the time of the prophet, peace be upon him. During the battle of the trench, the Jewish tribes of Medina violated their defence pact with the Muslims. They helped the disbelievers open up a passage so they can encircle and attack the Muslim armies from behind.

Take note that Allah guarded those who did not break their promise. He says: **some of them throw it away**' meaning that there were others who honoured their covenant with God. This type of expression is also known as safeguarding of probability, because on one hand it recognizes and respects those who honour their word, while, on the other hand it leaves God's doors of mercy wide open for anyone who wants to accept faith.

Sadly, those who kept their promises were a minority as illustrated in the last phrase of the verse: ' **In fact, most of them do not believe.'**

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